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The Life of

S. Francis of Assisi

600018688.

SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI.

BY THE

REV. F. LÉOPOLD DE CHÉRANCÉ,

OF THE ORDER OF FRIARS MINORS CAPUCHINS.

Translated from the French

WITH THE AUTHOR'S SPECIAL PERMISSION

BY

R. F. O'CONNOR.

"Ego mendicus sum et pauper."—Ps. xxix. 18.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

The new Life of Saint Francis of Assisi, now presented to the English reading public, has been very favourably received in France, a second edition, at present in process of production by Messrs. Poussièlgue Frères, having been called for. It is from the fluent and graphic pen of Father Léopold de Chérancé, Guardian of the Capuchin Convent at Angers, and has been honoured with the high approval of his Eminence Cardinal Pie, the lamented Bishop of Poitiers; Mgr. Mermillod, the persecuted Bishop of Geneva; and Mgr. Freppel, the illustrious prelate who presides with such distinction over the See of Angers, and is confronting the triumphant Revolution in the Legislative Chamber with a courage and a constancy worthy of the splendid militant and masculine spirit that pervades the Church of France. The letter of approbation received from the latter prelate, whose judgment in the matter of sacred literature is so highly esteemed that no one has deemed it necessary to take up the pen after his lordship, is given at length after the author's preface. The thanks of the translator are due, and are cordially and respectfully tendered, to the Very Rev. Father Siméon, Commissary-General, at whose instance the translation was undertaken, and

who kindly supervised the proofs; to Father Léopold, who promptly and gracefully accorded the necessary authorisation; and to the English publishers for the satisfactory way in which the work has been brought out. It is hoped that its perusal will help to foster devotion to the great mediæval saint, the pure and delicate lines of whose ascetical figure the author has traced with the feeling of an artist and the reverent enthusiasm of a disciple, and that even in the midst of an age when what Father Faber calls that sweet, sad cry of Franciscan devotion, "O Paris! Paris! thou hast spoiled Assisi!" has grown into a proverb, not a few will be found for whom the gentle and lovable Francis and his angelic companions—

> "la gente poverella,
> . . . . la cui mirabil vita
> Meglio in gloria del Ciel si canterebbe" *—

will still possess an irresistible attraction, an attraction which those who honestly strive to fashion their lives after the pattern that was shown them on the Mount, whether those lives are lived out on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and the hill country of Judea in the first century or the Umbrian valley in the thirteenth, never fail to exercise. In an age avid of wealth and luxury, and pursuing with impassioned eagerness the phantom of an ideal equality of classes, thoughtful minds will, perhaps, have sufficient discernment to recognise in the Pauper of Assisi—*il glorioso poverello di Cristo*—who, as Montalembert † observes, conquered the world by humility and love, becoming the Minor, the least of all men, presenting the most com-

* Dante, *Del Paradiso*, canto xi.
† *Hist. de S. Elisabeth de Hongrie.*

plete example of the folly of the Cross ever seen since that Cross had been planted on Calvary; who, man of the people, did more for the people than had ever yet been done by any one; whose vocation was to revive in the midst of a corrupting opulence the esteem and practice of poverty, which he ennobled, making it the pivot upon which the vast movement of religious and social regeneration that changed the whole aspect of the thirteenth century turned, the mother-thought and primary principle of the great mendicant order that moved the mediæval world, peopled heaven with saints, and, without setting class against class, or violating the least point of the divine or human law, levelled every social barrier and united princes and peasants in a bond of union which neither time nor eternity was to sever—thoughtful minds will recognise in the spirit that animated the Pauper of Assisi, and which he breathed into his age—spirit of Christian abnegation and Christian equality—a radical remedy for many of the ills contemporary society is heir to ever since the original sin of the Revolution was consummated in '89, and the body social and politic inoculated with its vicious principles.

CORK, *Feast of the Canonization of S. Francis*, 1880.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

"THERE is no lack of lives of S. Francis. What is the use of writing a new one?"

Such is the objection the reading of the title of this work will immediately raise in the public mind. We had foreseen it. To refute it victoriously, it will be enough for us to briefly relate how we have been led to undertake such a long-winded labour.

Glancing through the modern authors who have treated the life of S. Francis, we discovered here and there certain historical errors, such as the foundation of the Seraphic Order in 1210, its first establishment at Rivo Torto, &c., and, out of respect for the memory of our blessed Father, came to the determined resolution of re-establishing the facts in all their veracity, fearing that error might come to enjoy the benefit of prescription. It was an easy task, thanks to the labours of the Bollandists * on this subject, and was already far advanced when the discovery of a valuable manuscript of the fifteenth century, which is itself only a copy of a manuscript of the thirteenth, disclosed to our view new and broad horizons. The title of this manuscript is, *Chronicle of the Friars-Minors by*

* *Acta Sanctorum*, 4th October.

Bernard of Besse of the Province of Aquitaine: Life of S. Francis and his Companions. No doubt we had in our hands that famous chronicle of Bernard of Besse, the existence and authenticity of which the Bollandists have affirmed, since they have indicated the first words, *Quasi sol oriens*, but of which they could not procure a copy. Wadding seems to have been unaware of it, since he only mentions one writing of Bernard of Besse, his History of the Generals of the Order. However that may be, the veracity of this old chronicler can no more be contested than the authenticity of our work.

Bernard of Besse was, in fact, the contemporary, secretary, and confidant of S. Bonaventure, and, as well as the latter, might easily have conversed with the last survivors of the companions of S. Francis. He knew the Legend of the Seraphic Doctor, and, if he took up the pen after him, it was to gather the ears S. Bonaventure had dropped from his sheaf and let nothing of so great a memory as that of the Seraphic Patriarch perish. These are the author's own words. The chronicle is, then, the testimony of a contemporary, a reliable biographer, in a word, of a man as remarkable for his learning as his sanctity; and, consequently, it merits the same credence as those of the most accredited historians, Thomas of Celano, the three companions (Leo, Angelo, and Ruffino), and S. Bonaventure, whose praise is in all mouths.

Such is the work we have had the good fortune to lay our hands upon, and which will be a source of rejoicing to all for whom truth has still any attraction; for, besides its intrinsic value and the interest that naturally attaches to the narrative of a contemporary, it throws a vivid light upon one of the literary *chefs-d'œuvre* of the Middle Ages, the *Fioretti* or *Little*

Flowers of S. Francis of Assisi, an anonymous work of the beginning of the fourteenth century. Up to this the critics only recognised in the *Fioretti* a pure fiction, an imaginary legend, a pious romance. Now, on comparing these two works, we have arrived at the conviction that most of the anecdotes and legends of the *Fioretti*, the wolf of Gubbio, perfect joy, S. Francis's breviary, the curing of the leper, the temptation of Friar Ruffino, the vision of the novice who took a dislike to the habit, and a hundred others, were only the literal reproduction of the chronicle of Bernard of Besse; consequently, we have fully endorsed this assertion of Ozanam: "The *Fioretti* may be regarded as an epic summarising the heroic traditions of the Order of S. Francis, or rather as a reliquary enamelled with rude representations of the saint's miracles and types of his companions." *

Glad of this discovery, we threw ourselves heart and soul into the work, undismayed by the most laborious researches. Laying aside for a moment not only the modern authors from Wadding to the Marquis de Ségur (except to refer to them if necessary), but even the oldest and most authoritative biographies, such as Bartholomew of Pisa, Mariana of Florence, and Mark of Lisbon, we wished to ascend to the purest sources of the Franciscan traditions, and attentively reperuse all the hagiographical documents of the thirteenth century. The success and satisfaction surpassed our expectations. We felt the heart of S. Francis pulsating under those old dusty chronicles; and in their pages, where sons such as Thomas of Celano, Angelo, Leo, Ruffino, and S. Bonaventure delight in tracing the simple portrait of their Father, we followed our hero

* *Les Poètes franciscains.* Preface.

step by step, lived his life, suffered his sorrows, and rejoiced in his triumphs.

It is the result of our researches, our studies, and our meditations that we now publish. To depict the soul of the humble Mendicant of Assisi, the double work of nature and grace in him—the struggles of nature and the triumphs of grace—to bring out into clearer relief his action over his contemporaries, to group around him the ravishing figures of his companions, to preserve and, if necessary, restore to our saint and his age their original physiognomy, relying as much as possible upon contemporaneous evidence —such is the aim we had in view. We are not rash enough to think we have reached perfection; for it is with the figure of the Seraphic Patriarch as with the image of the Crucified, it defies both the pen and the pencil. But we have at least the consolation of having raised a monument the more to the memory of our illustrious founder.

We confidently offer this volume to our lordships the bishops, sure that the humility of the holy Patriarch and his devotion to the Holy See will greatly edify them.

We offer it to all the children of the Seraphic Father, to whatever branch they belong, to all the daughters of S. Clare, to the hundred thousand Christians who, by the Third Order or the Cord, are more or less united to the family of S. Francis. The teaching of their Father will protect them against the invasion of the ideas, or rather aberrations, of the day, and his example fortify their souls against the unheard-of extravagancies of the present generation.

We offer it, in fine, to all the children of the Catholic Church, and even to men—alas! too numerous nowa-

days—who have lost the sense of faith. If they do not admire in the Poor Man of Assisi the saint, the wonder-worker, and the founder; if his heroic sacrifice and abnegation is not for them a living demonstration of the divinity of Christianity, magnanimity of character, benevolence, the spirit of association, and art culture ought to find favour in their eyes. Who, in fact, that knows the ideas and customs of the thirteenth century, will not greet in the son of Bernardone a marvellous man, unsurpassed in devotion to the poor, who moved the whole world by means of his three Orders, and from the depths of his tomb gave rise to thousands of masterpieces?

For our part, we shall consider ourselves sufficiently rewarded for our trouble if we have the happiness of helping to revive that triple worship of honour, invocation, and love which, until the great Revolution, our fathers never ceased to pay to the Seraph of Assisi.

ANGERS, *May* 24, 1879.

HAGIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES.

THIRTEENTH CENTURY :—Thomas of Celano, *Antique Legend.* —Vincent of Beauvais, *Historical Mirror.—Legend of the Three Companions.— Legend of S. Bonaventure.*— Bernard of Besse, *Chronicle of the Friars Minors; History of the Generals of the Order.*—Thomas of Ceperano.

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SIXTEENTH CENTURY :—Mark of Lisbon, *Chronicles.*—Rodolph of Tossignano, Bishop of Sinigaglia, *Seraphic History.*— Surius, *Lives of the Saints.*—Sedulius, *Portraits of the Saints of the Order of S. Francis.*

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY : — Francis Gonzaga, *Origin of the Seraphic Order.*—Wadding, *Annals of the Friars Minors.* —*Acta Sanctorum.*

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY :—Chalippe, *Life of S. Francis.*

LETTERS OF APPROBATION.

APPROBATION OF THE BISHOP OF ANGERS.

My Rev. Father,—I have read your Life of S. Francis with lively interest. After so many works consecrated to the glory of the Seraphic Patriarch, yours comes to occupy a place apart. The discovery of the valuable manuscript of Bernard of Besse in the Angers library has enabled you, in fact, to shed new light upon this grand life. You have set to work with the love of a son jealous of collecting all that could honour his father's memory. And what a father! Francis of Assisi was one of the most faithful copies of the Divine Saviour who deigned to associate him with His passion by the signal privilege of the Stigmata, as He made him participate in His power by the gift of miracles. There is nothing in the history of the Church surpassing in power and grandeur that movement of Christian regeneration originating in the Umbrian valley and spreading over the whole world in the space of a few years. And it was a humble mendicant, holily enamoured of evangelical poverty, who was the hero of this marvellous epic before which reason and imagination stand amazed, so little relationship is there between cause and effect. Six centuries have elapsed since then, and all the works of S. Francis are erect, having lost nothing of their vitality or fecundity. His children, scattered by thousands over the world, continue, in the garb of sacrifice and poverty, to evangelise peoples; his spiritual daughters embalm the cloisters with the perfume of their virtues, as in the time of the virgin of Assisi, S. Clare, that first flower of the seraphic

garden; and, without binding themselves to him by such close bonds, more than a hundred thousand Christians in the bosom of their families and in every rank of life glory in bearing his name and striving to merit his patronage. It is for them in particular, reverend father, you have written this life, so instructive and attractive. A style pure and simple, but disdaining neither point nor colour, harmonising with a subject so poetical in itself; sound views of an epoch when crime jostled heroism; incidents artistically set in a framework descriptive of grand natural scenery, with a tone of piety well calculated to depict the character of a life whose love of Jesus Christ was its sole principle—all that will not fail to captivate the attention of your readers. So, I can do nothing but recommend your work to the faithful of my diocese; they will read it with as much interest as profit.

✠ CHARLES EMILE, BISHOP OF ANGERS.

APPROBATION OF THE THEOLOGIANS OF THE ORDER.

BY order of the Very Rev. Father Chrysostom of Lyons, Provincial of our Province of Paris, I have read and examined the work of the Rev. Father Léopold entitled, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, and found nothing therein but what is very orthodox and very capable of encouraging the faithful to devotion to our Seraphic Father. In faith of which I have given the present declaration at Nantes this 10th of April 1879.

F. FLAVIEN, CAPUCHIN.

BY order of the Very Rev. Father Chrysostom, Provincial of the Friars Minors Capuchins of the Province of Paris, I have read and examined the Rev. Father Léopold's work entitled, *Saint Francis of Assisi*. The author, leaving aside theological and critical discussions, out of place in a work of edification, wished to show our Seraphic Father such as he was among his disciples and the people under the action of grace and of Providence.

Devotion to this great saint, whose rôle in holy Church was so simple and so grand, can only be increased by the reading of this work, written with the love of a child for his father, the zeal and respect of a disciple for his master, and in which nothing is found but what is conformable to the doctrine and morals of the Roman Catholic Church. In faith of which I give this declaration.

F. PLACIDE, CAPUCHIN.

ANGERS, *16th April*, 1879.

APPROBATION OF THE VERY REV. FATHER PROVINCIAL.

THE Most Rev. Father Francis of Villafranca, Commissary-General of the entire Order, having authorised Father Léopold de Chérancé to cause his Life of Saint Francis of Assisi to be printed, we willingly allow the printing of this work. Given at Angers in our convent of Our Lady of the Seven Dolours, this 31st *May*, 1879.

F. CHRYSOSTOM, OF LYONS, MIN. PROV.

True Copy:
F. PAUL DE LACROIX,
SECR. PROV. CAP.

APPROBATION OF F. SIMEON.

I HAVE much pleasure in testifying to the accuracy and completeness of Mr. R. F. O'Connor's translation of the new Life of St. Francis of Assisi by Father Léopold de Chérancé, as well as to the readiness with which he undertook, and the ability with which he executed, what was to him a labour of love and filial devotion. Carefully avoiding, on the one hand, being too literal, and on the other too diffuse or paraphrastic, he has fully succeeded in reproducing not only the sense but the style of the original, the beauty of which is enhanced by certain graces peculiar to the pure and nervous English idiom of the translator.

F. SIMEON, of MONDON, COM.-GENERAL.

CORK, *Feast of the Canonization of S. Francis*, 1880.

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ERRATA.

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We read in the Chronicles of the Province of the Tyrol that the saint came to Bolsano (Botzen) with his father, repaired every morning to the church and served mass with the most edifying piety. As a *souvenir* of his sojourn in their town, the inhabitants preserved as a precious relic the bell he used at the altar. It is preserved in a turret of the Franciscan monastery, and is occasionally rung at the request of the farmers, who attribute to it the virtue of dispelling storms.

Pages 45, 71, 74, and 99.

For Subiaco *read* Subazio. Monte Subazio or Subassio is about a mile and a half to the north of Assisi, and is frequently confounded in English lives of S. Francis with Monte Subiaco, on the way from Rome to Naples, which was visited by the saint in 1222 in his progress through Southern Italy in the interval that elapsed between the two memorable scenes at Portiuncula. See p. 219.

Chapter VIII. *Page* 119.

The orange-etree is dead and the convent of San Francesco-a-Ripa has been converted into a barrack (1880).

S. FRANCIS OF ASSISI.

CHAPTER I.

Description of Umbria—Birth of Francis—His Education—His Youth.

(1182–1206.)

When one has quitted Rome and directed his course towards North Italy, after traversing the austere solitude of the Roman Campagna, he suddenly enters a broad and beautiful valley called Umbria, a name it received after the invasion of the Umbrians or Gauls, who, descending into Italy from the Alps, cast an envious glance at this rich province, and there fixed their abode about four hundred years before the Christian era. It extends from Spoleto to Perugia, and from the banks of the Tiber to the base of the Apennines. We invite our readers to transport themselves thither with us, in order to form a better understanding of the events we are going to relate.

We do not know any country at once more radiant and more picturesque. "It has the wild beauty of the Alps, its frowning summits, its forests, its ravines, where fall the wide-resounding cascades, but with a climate that prevents perpetual snow. Nature there wears an aspect as gentle as grand; inspires an ad-

miration devoid of terror; and if everything makes the Creator's power felt, everything likewise speaks His goodness." *

Do you wish to satisfy yourselves of the truth of this picture? Take the old Flaminian road that goes from Spoleto to Perugia on a fresh spring morning. Upon your right, as you emerge from Spoleto, you perceive the walls of the fortress with its somewhat Cyclopean foundation, the pointed arches of the aqueduct, the most gigantic perhaps in the world, the umbrageous forests of Monte Lucca, and, stretching across the horizon, the bluish line of the mountains that form the footstool of the Apennines. Upon your left and in front opens out the great valley of the Tiber. According as you advance, the air becomes milder, the vegetation more luxuriant, the curves of the Apennines more harmonious. One would think he was in a carefully-cultivated garden. The blooming citron, aloe, and almond alternate with the oak, the pine, and the fir; the vine twines in garlands round the elm; while the pale-leaved olive lightens every tint and gives a somewhat transparent and aerial effect to the landscape. A number of limpid streams, the Clituno, the Topino, and the Chiascio, tributaries of the Tiber, sparkle amid cypresses and willows, and fertilise the plain. Old towns perched upon the rocks like Trevi and Spello, or nestling in the valleys like Foligno and Bevagna, all still crenelated and full of classic and religious memories, proud of some saint whose remains or some Christian artist whose works they guard, challenge your admiration in passing. Soon you descry in the distance the winding Tiber descending from the abrupt declivities of Monte

* Ozanam: *Les Poètes Franciscains.*

Comero and coursing through fertile meadows. And when you have crossed the river at Ponte San Giovanni you have reached the farthest verge of the valley to enter the defiles of Tuscany, guarded by Perugia, the ancient capital of the Etruscans.

Thus would Umbria strike you with its mild climate, its varied but always enchanting sites, its poetic genius, its antique traditions, and simple and hospitable manners. Both entrances to this terrestrial paradise are guarded by the two cities of Perugia on the north and Spoleto on the south. To the north-east of the valley, at five leagues from Perugia, in the midst of this incomparably magnificent scenery, upon a slope overlooking the entire landscape, rises Assisi—Assisi, the pearl and queen of Umbria, the celebrated resort of tourist and pilgrim, and, in more than one respect, the equal of Rome and Loretto, since it gloried in being the cradle of the Seraphic Patriarch whose Life we are writing.

S. Francis was born in that city in the year 1182, under the Pontificate of Lucius III., and during the reign of Frederick Barbarossa, Emperor of Germany. His father, Peter Bernard of Moriconi, better known by the name of Peter Bernardone, was a rich merchant, a native of Lucca, and recently established at Assisi, where he carried on an extensive business with France. His mother, Pica, of the noble family of the Bourlemonts of Provence,* merited by her piety to

* The marriage contract between Peter Bernard and Pica was still preserved in the archives of Provence in the eighteenth century; and Father Claude Frassin, in his commentary on the Rule of the Third Order, published in 1703, affirms having seen it. Ottavo, in the beginning of the eighteenth century, says distinctly that the branch of the Moriconi remaining in Lucca belonged to the nobility.

become the mother of a saint. Pica had only two children, Francis and Angelo. The latter married, and the family of the Moriconi of Assisi still existed in that city in the first half of the sixteenth century.

Heaven, which had other designs upon Francis, was pleased to environ the cradle of this predestined child with extraordinary prodigies and heavenly presages. Pica was a prey to horrible sufferings, unable to give birth to her child, when a mysterious pilgrim, in exchange for an alms he had received, told the servants, "The mother will only be delivered in a stable, and the child see the light upon straw." However strange this counsel must have appeared, they were not slow to follow it. She was carried to an adjoining stable, and there happily gave birth to her first-born son. Thus Francis, like the Divine Saviour, as far as a creature can resemble the Creator, the copy, its model, was born among animals.

The stable is still seen at Assisi. It has been converted into a chapel, known by the name of San Francesco il Piccolo (S. Francis the Little). This old Latin inscription is read over the door—

> "Hoc oratorium fuit bovis et asini stabulum
> In quo natus est Franciscus, mundi speculum." *

It was said that Assisi had become another Bethlehem. During the night heavenly spirits chanted songs of peace and gladness over the poor sanctuary of Our Lady of Angels.

This child of benediction had had his prophet in the blessed Joachim, Abbot of Fiora in Calabria, who, ten years before, had written in his *Commentary upon Isaias*, "Umbria and Spain will give birth to two new

* This chapel was the stable of the ox and the ass, where Francis, the mirror of the world, was born.

orders destined to carry the torch * of the Gospel into every place." † He had his precursor in one of his compatriots, a man of the people, who for some time traversed the streets of Assisi, crying out with an inspired air, "*Pax et bonum*" (Peace and good).

Pica wanted them to call him Giovanni (John) at baptism, out of devotion to the beloved apostle. According to an old tradition, a stranger of austere mien and venerable air offered to hold the newly-born at the sacred font, kept him in his arms during the whole ceremony, gazing upon him with heavenly complacency, and then disappeared, leaving the impress of his knees upon the marble steps of the altar. The miraculous marble as well as the baptismal font are still shown in the cathedral church, with these commemorative words written thereon—

"Questo e il fonte dore fu battezzato il Seraphico Padre San Francesco." ‡

After baptism, another unknown envoy of God presents himself at his father's house, asking as a favour to see the little John. Delighted at obtaining it, he takes him in his arms like another Simeon, and greeting in this regenerated child one of God's elect, a younger brother, a future companion of his glory, he covers him with sweet kisses and caresses, traces upon his right shoulder the sign of the cross, as if to arm him from his birth as a knight of Christ, and then gives him back to the nurse, saying, "Carefully watch

* "A celebrated sign preceded the birth of S. Dominic. His mother saw in a dream the fruit of her womb under the form of a dog who was going to set the whole world on fire." *Vie de S. Dominique*, par le R. P. Lacordaire, chap. ii.

† *Acta Sanctorum*, 29 Maii.

‡ This is the font where the Seraphic Father, Saint Francis, was baptized.

over this child; for he will become great before the Lord. The princes of darkness have a presentiment of his lofty destiny, and will leave nothing undone to have his life. Take care he does not perish the victim of their snares." Having spoken these words, the stranger disappeared. In vain they searched the whole city—he could not be found.

The angel's recommendations were only too well founded. A short time after, a demoniac they were exorcising was obliged to confess it. The demons, publicly questioned, replied by his mouth that they had actually attempted this child's life more than once. But, add the old chroniclers, the same Providence that sheltered the cradle of Moses from the fury of the waves, rescued Francis from the rage and conspiracies of hell; and it was our saint himself who, later, delivered this unhappy demoniac from the evil spirits that held possession of him.

We thought it right to relate with fidelity and in their tone of charming simplicity these marvellous foreshadowings. They are penetrated and illuminated by the action of grace, and invested with a powerful attraction to which the unbeliever himself cannot long remain insensible; and every man of good faith will therein recognise with us the worthy first-fruits of a life which was to occupy so large a space in the history of the thirteenth century.

Peter Bernardone was then on a business tour in France. He was greatly rejoiced to learn, on his return, that a son was born to him, and the *Legend of the Three Companions* tells us that from that moment, and in memory of the fair kingdom of France, he gave little John the surname of Francis, which history has consecrated. Other authors assert that it was later,

on account of the facility with which the child learned and the grace with which he spoke our language. Whatever may be the value of these two opinions, "the obscure draper was far from thinking that the name of his own invention would be invoked by the Church and borne by kings."* As to Francis, as we will henceforward call him, he had always a filial affection for France, and our country may well glory in him as an adopted son.

His early years passed calmly and tranquilly under the shadow of the paternal roof, like those of the infant Jesus at Nazareth—age of innocence and peace, of hope and love, whose sweet perfumes it has not been given us to inhale! But, by a secret dispensation of Providence, Pica, like the august Virgin Mary, cherished in her heart his first smiles and lispings, those early blossoms of life, which she had all to herself. And the old historians of Francis, who took such pains to give us the lineaments of the founder, the wonder-worker, and the saint, have only devoted some slight touches to this family interior, the childhood of our saint and the part Bernardone's wife plays therein. Nevertheless, it is easy to discern in their expressions what was the distinctive character of the education given by such a noble lady. All agree in saying that she reared her son very carefully, and surrounded his cradle with all the tenderness of a young mother for her first-born, and all the piety of a Christian who is preparing a soul for heaven.

Convinced that maternity creates a kind of priesthood at the domestic hearth, Pica accepted its burden as well as its honours. She wished to nurse her own son. It is a duty authoritatively imposed upon every mother worthy of the name, and which none can forego with

* Ozanam.

impunity. Pica fulfilled it gladly, obedient to a sentiment of gratitude, not less than to the voice of nature. Francis was the son of her desires; she had obtained him in one of her most fervent prayers at the feet of Our Lady of Angels; and God had solemnly confided to her this sacred deposit. How could she consent to place this child of benediction in mercenary hands, and expose him to the unhealthy influence, perhaps corrupted and corrupting, of a stranger's milk? She kept him, then, at the breast; and Francis afterwards had reason more than once to thank God for it, and cry with St. Augustin, "Blessed be Thee, O Eternal Father, for it! For it was You who gently moved my mother to dispense to me without measure what she had received without measure from Your hand. . . . And I, in the milk that I imbibed with such delight, lovingly drank in the adorable name of Jesus, Your Son and my Saviour." *

Francis, according as he grew up, displayed a quickness, playfulness, and precocity of intelligence. Pica, without despising these advantages, strove above all to form his heart, and develop the happy inclinations she observed in him. Was she not right? The mind only holds the second place in the moral world; the heart is the masterpiece of man and the mainspring of life; it is it which gives all our acts their good or bad direction. Now, it has only two movements—it expands or contracts; it gives itself up to good or sacrifices everything to self. In a word, it is selfishness or self-devotion; and, according as it selects one or other of these two ways, it draws the whole soul after it. Everything, then, depends on the heart, and the heart itself obeys the first impulse it has received

* *Confessions*, lib. i. chap. vi.; lib. iii. chap. iv.

in early youth. Pica did not lose sight of these grand principles; she made them her rule of conduct, and spared no vigilance or solicitude to ensure success. To sow the seeds of faith and virtue in her son's soul, to accustom his lips to prayer, to initiate his heart in the joys of charity and self-devotion; such was her constant preoccupation. On his side, the angelic child corresponded admirably to such solicitude. His young soul expanded with delight to his mother's teachings, as the flower expands its calyx to the first rays of the sun; and they could already foresee that this blessed plant would one day bear delicious fruit.

Our readers have seen Pica's active share in the education of our saint. The little we have said is enough to glorify her, for the virtues of the son are chiefly the work of the mother, the natural instrument of Providence in the accomplishment of sanctification; she sows, and God gives life and growth. If, then, later on, Francis becomes the passionate lover of the poor, if amiability forms the salient feature of his physiognomy, if he is attached by every fibre of his soul to the Roman Pontiff, if, in fine, the Son of God honours him with the Stigmata of His Passion, imprinted upon virginal flesh, we do not hesitate to say it is to Pica primarily redounds the honour! Happy the families where the mother understands her mission so well! Happy the son to whom God gives such a mother! If, less faithful than Francis, he strays away for a moment, he sooner or later returns to the principles of faith he learned at his mother's knees.

The hour was come to form the mind of Francis. His parents, desiring he should receive an education

in accord with their fortune and the tastes of the age, confided him to pious ecclesiastics of the parish of St. George. His quick and lively intelligence relished the charms of polite literature in which he made rapid progress, and easily acquired Latin and French, "already regarded in Italy as the most delightful of all and the guardian of the chivalrous traditions that gave a polish to the ruggedness of the Middle Ages." * After his conversion, we will hear him speak a hundred times of his ignorance, but we will then remember that it was only through humility. He will depreciate the humanities, but because he will have had perpetually under his eyes a more excellent book, one that contains all knowledge, the Book of Jesus Crucified.

As soon as he had reached the age of fourteen, Bernardone took him into partnership. Both conducted their business energetically, but in a totally different spirit. The father was a hard, avaricious man, always on the look-out for big profits. The son was more highminded; he was affable, compassionate, generous to prodigality, and more avid of glory than of riches.† He loved fine dress, singing, gaming, and feasting; gave his friends rich repasts, and passed all his leisure time in pleasure parties. Bernardone looked with displeasure on this profusion, and frequently reproached him with it. "Indeed," he said, "one would take you for the son of a king, rather than the son of a merchant!" But he did not venture to say more for fear of grieving him. His mother left

* Ozanam.

† This liberality accompanied him everywhere, even beyond his native country. Tourists may find proof of it at Bolsano, where they still show a clock given by our holy young man when he went into the German Tyrol on his father's business.

him more freedom of action; she even sometimes took his part, and when the friends of the family alluded to Francis's dissipated life, she replied, "Wait awhile! For my part, I augur well of him, and see in him, even in his amusements, a nobility of character which gives me the highest hopes of his future." * Both tenderly loved him at heart; and, while regretting his prodigality, were flattered by his success and the sympathetic admiration he evoked.

We approach the moment when Francis emerges from adolescence to enter the critical age of youth, and be called upon in turn to take his share of public life. But, before following him through his triumphs and trials, we will stop for a moment on the threshold of this new phase of his life to contemplate that angelic figure that painters never tire of reproducing or people of loving.

Here is the portrait his disciple and confidant, Thomas of Celano, has handed down to us; one will recognise the remarkably fine features of the Umbrian population:—"His figure was above the middle height and well set. He was thin and of a very delicate constitution. He had an oval face, broad brow, white, close-set teeth, dark complexion, black hair, regular features, expressive countenance, rosy lips, and a charming smile. His beautiful black eyes were full of brilliancy, mildness, and modesty; the peace, innocence, and beauty of his soul were reflected upon his countenance. To these exterior advantages he joined those qualities that render a young man amiable: a playful wit, a lively imagination, a feeling and generous heart. He was discreet and true to his word,

* *Legend of the Three Companions.*

of an easy-going, pliant character, but full of energy at need; all things to all men, holy among the holy, and so humble among sinners that he was mistaken for one; active and accommodating in business, of graceful address, but still very simple in his words and actions."

Such a perfect combination of natural gifts and nascent virtues procured him the esteem and affection of all his compatriots. At eighteen, Francis exercised a kind of empire over them, which no one thought of disputing. Young men put him at their head, he was the soul of all their reunions, the king of all their feasts, their leader in every adventurous exploit. The inhabitants of Assisi, too, in their enthusiasm, had proclaimed him "the flower of the youth."

During this epoch of his life, which extends from his adolescence to his conversion, and comprises not less than ten years (1196–1206), Bernardone's son mingles with the noisy crowd, inhales the incense of flattery, is elated with the poetry of the period, steeps his lips in the golden cup the world offers him, and whence so many of his comrades drink death. He is in all the freshness of youth, and sought after by every one. And yet he passes through these perils and vanities without soiling his soul, like the traveller who passes safely along precipices. He openly proclaims his horror of immorality, avoids every unbecoming expression, replies to licentious language with a severe countenance, and thus, in the midst of an age noted for its corruption, keeps intact the precious treasure of purity. Such is the unanimous testimony his companions and early historians, Thomas of Celano, Bernard of Besse, St. Bonaventure, &c., bear to his youth. Such constancy

in so delicate a virtue is miraculous, and highmindedness or any other human motive is not enough to account for it. We must, then, with the Seraphic Doctor,* refer it to God, the source of all grace, and bless Him for having placed upon the young brow of His servant the grandest of crowns and divinest of privileges, the crown and privilege of virginity.

Francis, moreover, found in the depths of his soul another gift of God which served him as a safeguard against the seductions of the world and the temptations of the flesh,—it was the love of the poor, a love of predilection whose sweetness he had tasted from his earliest childhood, and which, growing with his growth, was to work so many prodigies! He cherished the poor as his brethren, and took a pleasure in giving them alms, particularly when they asked it for the love of God. At those words, "For the love of God!" his soul trembled, as if struck by a mysterious arrow, and, although still a worldling, he felt deeply moved. Once only, when very busily engaged, he repulsed a beggar who had used this formula. But immediately a thought, rapid as lightning, cruel as remorse, crossed his mind. "Francis," said he to himself, "if this man came to you on the part of some powerful count or baron, you would have received him favourably; and when he implores you in the name of the King of kings, you thus repulse him!" And with repentance in his soul and tears in his eyes he runs after the beggar, puts several silver pieces in his hand, and from that hour came to the firm resolution of never refusing an alms when asked for the love of God—a resolution to which he remained faithful to his last breath, and which merited

* S. Bonaventure, chap. i.

for him a more abundant outpouring of the graces and benedictions of Heaven.

S. Bonaventure here relates an incident which deserves to be told. A man of the people, very simple and doubtless supernaturally enlightened, gave him an ovation unexampled in history. Every time he met Bernardone's son in the streets of Assisi he strewed his mantle under his feet, crying out to the astonished bystanders, "You cannot render too much honour to this young man; he will shortly distinguish himself and be honoured by all the faithful." Francis heard these prophetic words, but without understanding their divine scope.

Honours and prosperity are an intoxicating liquor that turns the best heads. Perhaps it had corrupted the pious youth's soul, too, had not God been careful in mixing with it the bitter but salutary draught of trial and suffering.

The trial was as long as unexpected. At that epoch of trouble and division the cities of Umbria formed so many independent petty republics, always rivals and often combatants, and war between neighbouring cities was not rare. In 1201 Assisi entered into a struggle with Perugia, but the fortune of war was not favourable to it. Francis and several of his fellow-citizens were surprised in an encounter, made prisoners, and taken to Perugia.† Their captivity lasted an entire year. All these young cavaliers were deeply dejected at such an unexpected reverse. Francis alone preserved his good humour and frank gaiety, trying with his customary witticisms to raise the courage of his companions. The latter, irritated by chagrin, as

* S. Bonaventure, chap. i.
† *Legend of the Three Companions.*

almost always happens, took offence at a confidence and animation which formed such a striking contrast to their position; and their discontent one day found expression in rather severe reproaches. "I pity you, my friends," replied Francis; "for my part, my mind is very free and full of confidence. You now see me loaded with chains; one day you will see me honoured by the whole world." It was not foolish pride or vain ostentation that made him speak like this: he only called to mind the prediction of the old man of Assisi of whom we have spoken in the preceding page.

It is very probable the young cavaliers little relished this kind of consolation. However that may be, Francis did not cease to give them proofs of the spirit of charity that animated him, particularly in a circumstance his early historians have not failed to relate. One of the prisoners, of a character naturally inclined to violence and still embittered by vexation, having insulted his comrades, they all "cut" him. Our gentle youth first exhorted them to forgiveness; then, seeing that his efforts led to nothing, turned to the culprit, kept him company, pacified him and made him thoroughly sociable; so successfully that at last, subjugated by such patience and meekness, all his companions in misfortune cherished an unbounded esteem and affection for him. In the year 1202 peace was concluded between the two rival cities, and our prisoners recovered their liberty.

Here ended for Francis his noisy worldly life, that life which he will henceforth call his "life of sin," weeping over those years of dissipation, and thanking God for having miraculously snatched him from it.

Some authors of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, interpreting too literally this expression of

the saint's "my life of sin," have supposed that he imitated S. Augustin in his errors before imitating him in his conversion. It was an odious mistake, which the contemporary chroniclers refute at the outset, as we have already affirmed. All attest that Francis preserved his baptismal innocence, not only during his youth but to the end of his life; and Friar Leo assures us he had learned it by revelation. "He saw his blessed Father in a dream," he relates,* "standing upon the summit of a mountain in the midst of a parterre of flowers and holding a beautiful lily in his hand; and, as he inquired the meaning of this vision, a heavenly voice replied that this lily was the symbol of the angelic purity of Francis." Such a testimony, coming from such an authoritative mouth, allows us to designate the place of Bernardone's son in the family of saints.

Among the multitude of the elect who people heaven, there are really only two kinds of souls—the S. Johns and the S. Marthas on the one hand, the S. Peters and the S. Mary Magdalenes; that is to say, the pure souls and those who do penance. If in his testament and elsewhere he accuses himself of having dissipated the flower of his youth in the vanities and passions of the world, it is because he speaks the language of the saints, who not only weep over their faults, but also for the days passed in negligence and tepidity. We thought it right to give this explanation at once, so as to let no cloud rest upon the reputation of young Francis and the integrity of his morals, even in the midst of the world.

Such, in a word, were his childhood, adolescence, and youth.

* See Bartholomew of Pisa.

How the traveller rejoices when, after a stormy night, he descries the pale dawn and the first morning gleams! Such, but still more delightful, is our emotion when, forgetting the misfortunes and crimes of our epoch, we are present, in thought, at the dawning of those grand luminaries called "Saints" whom God suspends in the firmament of His Church. The Patriarch of Assisi is one of those luminaries, the most attractive and resplendent of the Middle Ages. What more charming than the dawn of his life, those marvels that environ his cradle, the purity of his childhood, and even those youthful adventures intermingled with such love of God and of the poor! We have a presentiment that this star will traverse with giant strides the track traced for it by the Hand of God. And yet, before ascending the horizon and shedding such a brilliant light, he will hesitate, he will even resist the divine call; and we will see in the following chapter the different phases of that struggle between God and the soul, unceasingly renewed and always full of thrilling interest — a struggle in which God triumphs, and Francis is happily conquered.

CHAPTER II.

CONVERSION OF FRANCIS—RETREATS INTO A GROTTO—PILGRIMAGE TO THE TOMB OF THE APOSTLES—THE PICTURE AT S. DAMIEN'S—FRANCIS AT THE BISHOP'S TRIBUNAL.

(*1206–1207.*)

ATTACHMENT to the world and its vanities still lurked in the heart of Francis. This attachment, without being criminal, was a peril to the eternal future of his soul and an obstacle to the designs of God, who wished to make this young man the sure and docile instrument of His mercies. These bonds must be broken, and God will not cease to strike blow after blow until they are all severed, one after the other.

The long captivity at Perugia, while enlightening the mind of our holy youth, left him most of his illusions. So, hardly had he returned home, when Providence sent him a new trial, or rather a new grace destined to render him more pliant under the action of the Holy Spirit—suffering! A long and cruel malady nailed him to a bed of pain, isolating him from men despite himself, and, finishing the work begun by misfortune, removed his remaining illusions. As soon as he felt strong enough to walk he quitted the town, supported by a staff, to inhale the fresh country air. But, to his great astonishment, those beauties of nature he had so often admired, that fertile plain, that ravishing sunset whose dying gleams seem to set the Apennines on fire, that evening breeze so agreeable to convalescents—all that appeared to him discoloured,

cold, and sombre; and his disenchanted gaze saw, through creation's veil, the nothingness of earthly things and the eternal beauty of God. An unusual sentiment—disgust—invaded his soul; he disdainfully rejected what, until then, he had most loved, and his past life seemed to him a folly. The impression was very vivid but fleeting. The passion of glory, which slumbered in the depths of the invalid's heart, reawakened with returning health; and Francis gave himself up, as before, to his taste for fine dress and chivalrous adventures. One had said that he wished to escape from the embraces of God, who was pursuing him. He was running towards the eternal enemy of God and men without any misgiving, unsuspecting the homicidal snares the world was laying for him, that reprobate world of which mention is made in the Gospel, and which fascinates, captivates, blinds, and misleads us to our ruin!

However little one may know of human frailty, and how Heaven is obliged to besiege a soul before achieving a complete victory over it, one will not be surprised at these returns upon self. What man, however holy, has not sooner or later experienced those hesitations, that interior combat, that struggle between God and the world who are disputing the possession of our heart? For we have only the choice between two masters, and we must necessarily take sides with one or other.

There was only one link more attaching Francis to the world; but this link was not yet broken. The vanities of the age, those thousand trifles that have such charms for youth, spoke betimes to his imagination, plucked him by the robe of the flesh, and whispered softly in his ear, as they did to S. Augustin on the eve of his conversion, "Art thou going to bid us an

eternal adieu? How then! Henceforward we will no longer keep thee company! And even now, such and such things will be forbidden thee and for ever!" At other times, impressing him with the force of habit, "that second nature of the soul," they cried ironically, "Thinkest thou, thou canst live without us?"

Francis dared not break such delightful bonds, and his heart was divided. Nevertheless, ever since the walk we have spoken of in the beginning of this chapter, he drew closer either to the Heart of God or the misery of the poor, his well-beloved brethren. About that time having met a soldier, a nobleman, but penniless and wretchedly clad, he saw and loved in him the poverty of Jesus Christ; and, touched with compassion, immediately took off his costly clothes and put them on him. The Lord, who leaves no good work unrewarded, sent him the following night a prophetical dream. Francis found himself suddenly transported into a magnificent palace filled with arms marked with the sign of the Cross. "Whose palace and whose arms are these?" he asked in a transport. A voice promptly replied, "For thee and thy soldiers."

He rose at daybreak, marvelling at this vision, and full of confidence in the promises of the Lord; but, still a novice in the mysterious ways of God, he only raved of brilliant feats of prowess and military conquests.* Circumstances, besides, seemed to favour his warlike tastes and aspirations. It was in the year 1206. The old struggle between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines had just revived in the south of the Italian peninsula, where Gautier III., Count of Brienne, one of the defenders of national independence, disputed with

* S. Bonaventure.

Frederick II. the fair kingdom of the Two Sicilies.* The people were always passionately attached to the cause of national independence. Francis threw himself heart and soul into it; and, after having bade adieu to his family, and told his friends he would become a great captain, set out with a brilliant equipage to offer his services to the Count de Brienne, who was reputed the most loyal noble of his time.

When the Lord knocks at the door of His creature's heart, and the latter closes it against Him, He goes away and does not return. If, on the contrary, the creature opens and obeys, but, while obeying, deviates, then, sometimes by ordinary, sometimes by extraordinary and miraculous means, He stops him, enlightens him and guides him, as it were, by the hand. It was precisely the case with our young cavalier. He had taken the wrong road; he was returning to the world. Then Divine Providence intervenes with the design of striking one of those decisive blows upon which the whole future life depends; it has recourse to the all-powerful miracle. It strikes Francis upon the road to Spoleto, as it struck Saul on the road to Damascus, and, by a new dream, clears away the obscurity of the first. Half asleep, he heard a heavenly Voice say to him, "Francis, which of the two can do thee most good: the master or the servant, the rich one or the pauper?" "The master and the rich one," he replies. "Why, then," resumes the Voice, "leavest thou God who is both rich and the Master, to run after man who is only the servant and the pauper?" And Francis cries out, "Ah! Lord; what willest Thou I should do!" "Go," pursues the Voice, "return to thy native

* The Guelphs were the partisans of Italian independence; the Ghibellines of the German Empire.

city; for the vision thou hast had has a purely spiritual meaning. It is from God, and not from men, thou shalt receive its accomplishment."

Francis, like Saul, yields to the power of sacred love. His reply is identical with that of the great Apostle, his reward will be the same; like him, he will be one of the luminaries of the Church, like him, he will dispel the world's darkness, and bear to Christian nations relapsed into Paganism the immortal torch of the Gospel. One knows not which to admire most—the Divine Wisdom Who stakes all His perfections to operate that superhuman prodigy, called the conquest of a soul, without interfering with its freedom of action; or the prompt obedience of this young cavalier, who lays down his sword and renounces his dearest dreams of glory to enrol himself in the humble militia of Christ.

With the first glimpse of dawn, Francis, abandoning his journey to Apulia, quitted Spoleto in all haste, and retraced the road to Assisi, caring nothing for the judgment of the world, and with no other pre-occupation than that of executing the orders of the Most High. On his return, his boon companions, no less surprised than rejoiced, and not suspecting any change in his ideas, begged him, as of old, to be the ruler of their revels. He received them with his usual courtesy, invited them to a feast, which was to be the last, and treated them with princely magnificence; but the smile of joy only hovered upon his lips, his heart was on high. After the repast, they went away laughing and planning through the streets; the king of the feast, Francis, walking behind, the baton of command in his hand and his mind absorbed in a profound reverie. Suddenly the Spirit of God descends upon him; a

heavenly vision breaks upon his view, and inundates him with a light so calm and powerful that he remains speechless and motionless. He afterwards told his confessor that, during this ecstasy, if they had torn his body in pieces he would not have felt it, his soul was so rapt in God!

His companions, seeing him motionless, tremblingly drew nigh, but soon after, when he came to himself, continued their frivolous conversation, and said jestingly, "What were you thinking of? Were you thinking of taking a wife?" "Yes," he gravely replied, "I will take a wife, but a spouse so rich, so noble, so beautiful, that there are none like her to be found in the world!" * He meant evangelical, holy Poverty. It was the betrothed whose incomparable beauty the Holy Spirit had just revealed to him, that mystical spouse too long despised by the world, to whom Francis was going to unite himself by sacred and indissoluble bonds, to have her for his only companion, his lady, and his sovereign!

He had bidden an eternal farewell to the vanities of the world! Then, abandoning as far as he could his father's business, he sought a solitary place wherein to study the means of acquiring the precious pearl of divine love. In that, he was obeying the inner yearnings and secret impulse of his soul no less than the attractions of heaven; for, after extraordinary strokes of grace, as after great life-sorrows, man feels the need of fleeing the society of his fellows, to collect his thoughts. It is a phenomenon reproduced in the life of every saint, which permits us to thus formulate one of the most invariable laws of the divine government in the supernatural order: "Has

* *Legend of the Three Companions.*

God selected a soul, and willed to mould it into one of those heroes called prophets, apostles, and virgins! He takes that soul, separates it from the world, and leads it into solitude." It is easy to justify the conduct of Providence in regard of its elect. In the midst of the commotion of the age, its voice, had it the resonance of thunder, would hardly have reached their ears; in the silence of retreat, on the contrary, a whisper suffices: they listen, and hang upon the lips of God!

Francis retired into a grotto near Assisi, where he passed the greater part of his days alone with God, conjuring Him with tears to pardon him the misspent years of his thoughtless youth, and to henceforth direct his steps in the narrow paths of perfection. Let us leave the Seraphic Doctor to tell how Heaven rewarded such prayers. "One day while our young penitent redoubled his fervour and was lost in God, Jesus Christ nailed to the Cross appeared to him. At this sight the heart of Francis melted with sorrow and love; and the remembrance of the Passion was so deeply imprinted upon his soul, that, from that day forward, at the sole thought of Jesus Crucified, he could not restrain his tears and sighs, as he himself confessed to his companions towards the close of his life." *

There are stages in the way of good, as in the way of evil. In the conversion of Francis of Assisi we distinguish three in particular. The vision of Poverty marks the first stage, that of the Palace the second, and that of the Saviour on the Cross the third and last, completing what the others had begun. There, in effect, in the rays of the Divine effulgence, he

* S. Bonaventure, chap. i.

discerned, in the countenance of the suffering Jesus, the ideal of all beauty, all grandeur, all perfection—an ideal which will always remain engraved upon his mind, and whose features he will strive to imitate. There he learns that sanctity is nothing else than the resemblance of the God-Man; there he sees distinctly the means of acquiring it; and Christian perfection appears to him by turns as a traffic which begins by contempt of the world, a warfare which consists in conquering one's self, and a career in which each one must bear his cross, walking in the footsteps of Jesus. He understood and set to work courageously, without ever looking behind.

Then we see him oftener quit his cavern, sometimes to discourse upon heavenly themes with one of his friends, the only one who had remained true to him; sometimes to give himself up to the practice of works of mercy and piety. To distribute money, provisions, and even his own clothes to the poor; to sympathise with them in their troubles, so that none departed without consolation; to assist indigent priests with exquisite delicacy; and, out of respect for the Adorable Eucharist, help to decorate neglected altars and tabernacles—such were the things he delighted in! He was truly the father, the patriarch of the poor, according to the beautiful expression of S. Bonaventure. In his father's absence he loaded the table with bread at meal-time, and when his mother asked him one day, "Who are all these provisions for?" he replied with an angelic smile, "Mother, it is for God's poor; for I have them all in my heart!" And the happy Pica, touched by his words, gazed with fond complacency upon her son.

Still all these good works, however excellent they

were, did not yet realise the ideal he had formed of Christian perfection, or slake his thirst of self devotion. He gave away everything, he wanted to give himself—but where and how? In the midst of his perplexities he conceived the project of going to Rome to visit the tomb of the Apostles, for the purpose of obtaining the complete remission of his sins, and, perhaps, also, in the hope of receiving new lights upon his vocation. He repaired, then, on a pilgrimage to the Eternal City,* to prostrate himself upon the pavement of S. Peter's in lengthened prayer, with what fervour our readers may divine. Upon rising, he was pained to observe how poor were the offerings of the pilgrims for the completion of this majestic edifice. "What!" he cried, "has devotion grown so cold? Why do not men give all they have, even themselves in a sanctuary where the ashes of the Prince of the Apostles repose? How is it, that they do not adorn with all possible magnificence that stone upon which Jesus Christ built His Church?" And taking a handful of money out of his purse, he threw all he had upon the marble tomb. Three centuries after, one of his spiritual sons, Pope Sixtus V., was to realise his wishes, and place its crown upon the queen of basilicas.

Emerging from the basilica, Francis saw a crowd of poor people imploring the charity of the faithful. He joined them, exchanged his clothes for the rags of the poorest, and remained until the close of the day on the steps of the portico, asking alms in French. Such an heroic act wrings from the great soul of Bossuet a cry of admiration: "Ah! how well Francis begins to make profession of the folly of the Cross and evangelical poverty!" †

* *Legend of the Three Companions.*

† *Panegyric of S. Francis of Assisi.*

Next day our pious pilgrim retraced the road to Umbria, and promptly regained Assisi, where Christ awaited him in order to show him clearly his vocation; for by a condescension, rare even in the lives of the saints, He deigned to become Himself the teacher and guide of Francis in the spiritual ways. The happy disciple, on his part, consulted none but this Master of masters; and, knowing that it is not good to reveal the secrets of the Great King, never disclosed them to any one, except the Bishop of Assisi, his spiritual father and director of his conscience.*

One morning as he was pacing meditatively under the ramparts of Assisi, moved by the Holy Spirit, he entered the church of S. Damien, a church so old and dilapidated that it looked as if it was going to fall. There, alone, kneeling before a magnificent picture representing Jesus on the Cross, he uttered thrice this beautiful prayer, which he often repeated afterwards: "Great God, full of glory, and You, Lord Jesus, I implore You to enlighten me, to dispel the darkness of my understanding, and grant me a pure faith, a firm hope, and a perfect charity. Cause me, O my God, to know Thee so well that I may never act except in accordance with Your lights and in conformity with Your holy will."

He had spoken, and, with his eyes bathed in tears, was lovingly contemplating the image of the Crucified when suddenly a voice, issuing from the Saviour's mouth, thrice addressed to him these mysterious words, "Francis, go and repair My house, which you see falling into ruin." At this Voice from heaven he remained for a time motionless, aghast, pale with dread —such is the fear of God in man! Recovering him-

* *Legend of the Three Companions.*

self, and interpreting literally the orders of the Omnipotent, he goes in all haste to execute them. Meeting the priest at the church door, "Don Pietro," he says, "take this money to buy oil and keep a lamp before the picture of the Crucifixion." Then, returning home, he seizes a piece of valuable material, mounts a horse, rides to Foligno, sells the horse and merchandise, and lays at the priest's feet the proceeds of this "fortunate traffic." *

The chaplain acceded to Francis's desire to remain some days with him; but, dreading the anger of the avaricious Bernardone, refused the young man's offering. And the saint, thinking no more of his gold, now useless, than the dust of the highroad, throws it contemptuously out of one of the chancel windows.

Every soul sincerely converted to God, and intending to give itself wholly to Him, must expect to see all the powers of earth and hell rise up against it, according to the prediction of the Divine Master, "You will be hated by all men for My sake." † Persecution is the appanage and the honour of the disciples of Calvary. This new glory was not wanting to the son of Bernardone, and it first came from his own family.

Peter Bernardone was absent on business for several months. Learning, on his return, of his eldest son's conduct, his almsgiving and particularly his sudden change of life, bursting with indignation, he ran at once to S. Damien's with some of his friends. At the sound of their footsteps and their threatening language,

* S. Bonaventure. There is no need of pleading our saint's justification in this. It is enough to recall that, having been long in partnership with his father, he did not on this occasion violate any natural or civil law.

† Matt. x. 22.

our holy youth, still hardly inured to these kind of combats, was terrified; he fled and concealed himself in his host's room. According to a tradition, which is not devoid of foundation, he sank into the wall the moment Bernardone entered, thus miraculously escaping from his father's angry glances.*

After their departure he took refuge in that beloved solitude, in that grotto endeared to him by the apparition of Jesus on the Cross. His retreat was only known to one of the servants, who secretly brought him the necessaries of life. There he passed an entire month, imploring light and succour from on high with more fervour than ever, mortifying his flesh by appalling austerities, pondering in his heart on the mysterious words of the picture at S. Damien's, and seeking above all to know what God required of him. The demons, furious at seeing their prey escaping them, often came to trouble him in his retreat, and entered, so to speak, upon a hand-to-hand struggle with him to bring him again under the yoke of that world he had cast aside. Sometimes they brought to mind all that could enchant him, those fêtes, those delightful evenings when he was king of the youth (and we know the power of such memories upon an imagination of twenty!); and at other times threatened to render him ugly and deformed. Francis was not to be duped by their artifices, and victoriously encountered all their assaults.

At last he quitted his retreat to confront his enemies like a soldier who, after recruiting his strength, takes up arms and recommences the struggle with renewed ardour. He reappeared in Assisi, his face pale and worn, his cheeks furrowed by continual tears but fear-

* They painted a touching image of S. Francis in this recess or niche.

less and stouthearted with the energy of a valiant knight of Christ. At his aspect the crowd first stopped, stricken mute with astonishment and pity; then, fickle as the waves of the sea, suddenly breaking out into murmurs, railleries, and contemptuous jeers, they threw stones and mud at this idol whom they had lately borne in triumph and until that very day worshipped. "He is a fool!" was the cry on all sides. Oh, inconstancy of popular favour! And, heartrending to relate! in the front rank of the young man's insulters were his former boon companions. For his part, he quietly pursued his way in the midst of all this hooting, replying to their exclamations by silence, to their insults by forgiveness, to their hatred by love. He was a fool, not as they thought, but with that divine folly of the Cross which has saved the world!

Bernardone soon heard of what was going on. This news, it may be easily conceived, was like the stab of a dagger to him: a father is proud to excess on the point of honour; how could he endure his children to be trailed in the mud and become the object of public ridicule? Bernardone then runs to the piazza, still swayed by his prejudices, not to defend his son and rescue him from a kind of popular commotion, but to put an end to what he calls a scandal. With fire in his eyes, and lips quivering with rage, he pounces upon him like a lion upon an innocent lamb, showers unmeasured blows and reproaches upon him, summons him, in the name of paternal authority, to give up such extravagances as these; but, seeing him insensible to threats and entreaties, shuts him up in a dark hole under the staircase, swearing to leave him there until he shall have changed his life. The saint's companions, who exhibit much emotion in hearing of this act of

violence, add that all this rigour will only lead to one result—to make the young captive's virtue stronger and brighter. To all his father's outrages he never opposed anything but the most unalterable meekness, happy to suffer for justice' sake, desirous only of accomplishing the work of God, and for his sole defence repeating what the Prince of the Apostles replied to the magistrates of Jerusalem, "It is better to obey God than men."

We have related the circumstance without comment, according to contemporary biographers; but there is a question they have not touched, and which it seems to us right to elucidate. It is this,—Why is the father's conduct reprehensible, and what is his share of responsibility in this conjuncture? We will give our opinion with all the impartiality history demands, un disguisedly, but also dispassionately, guarding ourselves even against that instinctive sentiment which leads us to take part with the weak against the strong, with the victim against the persecutor.

Let us say at once, Bernardone's crime was, with the most unjustifiable obstinacy, to have raised an obstacle to his son's vocation. Vocation! A thoroughly Christian word which signifies, "call from on high," and contains one of the profoundest mysteries of human life! Every one has his vocation; it is God who gives it, and let it be ordinary or extraordinary, to the world or the cloister, that call must be obeyed. Upon this, in the moral order, our whole future depends, and in the social order, peace or trouble, the happiness or unhappiness of nations. Is not society, in effect, an army in which every one should take the post of honour which Providence assigns to him? And if, unless in such a state of disorder or anarchy, the sad spectacle of which

we witness nowadays, one deserts that post, what must he expect? As to parents, they have only one right and one duty in quality of helpers and lieutenants of God—to direct, test, and, if need be, foster a vocation once known; but to combat it, never! Now, that of Francis was manifest: God had clearly revealed it to him in the church of S. Damien, when He said, "Francis, go, repair My house which is falling into ruin." The holy young man obeyed; it was his duty. And when his father stops him, disregarding the oracles of Heaven; when he shuts him up in a black hole, on the pretext that the career embraced by Francis is a dishonour to the family, he usurps the rights of the Sovereign Lord; and history, in accord with conscience, condemns him for having strangely abused the paternal authority. Besides, what folly to cope with the Omnipotent! Bernardone could only be vanquished in that unequal struggle, and vanquished he was.

We do not know how long Francis's captivity lasted (it is probable it was not prolonged beyond one or two months); but we know how Providence put an end to it. Pica, silent and afflicted, suffered as much as her son from the bad treatment inflicted upon him. Using that power of mediation, which in the family naturally belongs to the mother, she tried to bring about a reconciliation between two beings whom she equally loved. It was a difficult undertaking. The first whom she addressed, Bernardone, would not listen to a word. Repulsed in this quarter, she did not lose courage, and turned to the poor prisoner. Profiting by her husband's absence, one day she penetrates into the black hole, sits down alongside Francis, and in a long conversation, and by the most pressing motives, tries to induce him to return to the family life. She exhausts

all the resources of maternal affection, but tears and caresses—all is of no avail; the young prisoner always appeals victoriously to the will of the Most High and the words of the miraculous picture. At last understanding, with that tact and rapid intuition with which the Creator has endowed woman, that she has before her an evidently supernatural vocation, and thinking it would be impious to go against the designs of God, comes to a decision as wise as bold; she breaks the captive's bonds, opens his prison doors, and, having tenderly embraced him, leaves him quite at liberty to follow the extraordinary way into which God calls him.

She had acted as a mother, and a Christian mother. Francis thanked God for his deliverance, and Pica, who had been instrumental in accomplishing it, and immediately returned to the church of S. Damien. Peter Bernardone, on his return, vented his rage upon his wife. "Why do you side with your son?" he cried. "He is ruining our house by his extravagance, and dishonouring it by his folly! I will go and seek him myself, and bring him back or hunt him out of the country!" And he rushes off in a fury to S. Damien's. Thus, by a contrast which is only too frequent, he who would shut his eyes to the profuseness of Francis when still a worldling, and let him go far away, brilliantly equipped, to fight under the orders of the Count de Brienne, could not endure that this same son, once converted, should give alms or consecrate himself to God!

The holy youth did not fly this time; he bravely confronted his father, heard his complaints, and replied with respectful firmness, "A truce to insults and menaces! I count them as nothing, and am ready to suffer everything for the name of Jesus Christ!"

Bernardone, seeing him immovable in his resolutions, and like a rock against which the sea waves break in vain, only thought of recovering the price of the stuff and the horse. He found the money under the window out of which Francis had thrown it, clutched it with a greedy hand and returned, vexed and furious at having only half succeeded. On the way the demon of cupidity suggested to him to wring from this rebellious son a complete legal renunciation of his share of the inheritance; and Bernardone, yielding to the temptation, went to enter a plaint against him, first before the magistrates, then, as they had no jurisdiction, before the Bishop of Assisi.*

The bishop, Guido Secundi, cited the alleged culprit before his tribunal. Francis had too much respect for authority to think for an instant of resisting such a summons. "Yes," he replied to the messengers, "I will go to the bishop, because he is the father and pastor of souls." The worthy prelate, who more than once had had occasion to appreciate the merit and virtues of the accused, received him rather with the kindness of a father than the severity of a judge. "My son," said he, "your father is very angry with you. If you wish to serve God in all righteousness, give him back the money that belongs to him. Have confidence in God, act frankly, fear not. God will help you, and provide for your wants for the good of His Church." Encouraged by these words, Francis rises, and, in a transport of fervour, as if filled with the Holy Spirit, replies, "My lord, I restore to my father all that is his, even the garments I wear." He immediately

* The civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction were then very distinct; and Francis, as a servant of God, was amenable to episcopal authority.

retires, takes off his clothes, and, coming forward, clad only in a hair shirt, lays them at the prelate's feet; then, in an inspired tone which causes the bystanders to tremble, he cries out, "Hear and understand: until now I have called Peter Bernardone my father; henceforward I can boldly say, 'Our Father, Who art in heaven,' in Whom I have placed all my treasures and all my hopes." *

The witnesses of this indescribable scene wept with emotion and admiration. The bishop, too, was visibly moved, and big tears dropped from his eyes. He quitted his seat, covered the sublime nudity of the saint with his mantle, and held him long clasped to his breast. Like Francis's mother he comprehended, in presence of such an heroic sacrifice, that God was leading this young man by extraordinary ways; he assured him of his protection and devotedness, and vowed to him an affection which was never belied.

They brought the cloak of a poor peasant in the bishop's service; Francis gratefully accepted it, traced a white cross upon it with mortar, and withdrew, stripped of everything, the poorest but the happiest of men: happy in having no other possession but God, expecting nothing but from God, receiving nothing but for the love of God! "Oh, what a grand bankrupt this merchant becomes to-day! O man, worthy of being written in the book of the evangelical poor, and henceforward living on the capital of Providence!" †

It was in the month of April 1207; Francis was then twenty-five.‡

Four centuries afterwards the same cause produced a scene almost identical, and which is too much to the

* *Legend of the Three Companions and of S. Bonaventure.*
† Bossuet. ‡ Bernard of Besse.

point to forego the pleasure of relating it to our readers. Another S. Francis, gentle, amiable, and zealous like the illustrious Patriarch whose name he bore, Francis de Sales, while still a young priest, accepted the perilous mission of Chablais, confided to him by Monseigneur Claude de Granier, Bishop of Geneva. This news was a thunderbolt to M. de Boissy, father of S. Francis de Sales. Unable to conquer the constancy of the young apostle, or resignedly consent to his departure, he, too, appealed to the bishop. "My lord," he cried in a voice broken by sobs, and kneeling upon the ground, "I have allowed my eldest son, who was the hope of my house, of my old age, and of my life, to devote himself to the Church, to be a confessor (that is to say, a perfect observer of the Gospel); but I cannot consent to his being a martyr, and that you should send him to the stake as a victim to be torn by wolves." "Remember," replied the bishop, "that you both bear the name of S. Francis of Assisi. Take care that by your resistance you do not make your son act like his glorious patron, quit even his clothes to give them back to you in my presence, and in this state of denudation follow the standard of Jesus Crucified!" The young priest then cast himself at his father's feet to obtain his consent: it was in vain. "Be assured," resumed the old man, "that you shall have neither my blessing nor consent to your undertaking;" and he retired in affliction to the castle of Sales. Nevertheless, after the apostolic achievements of his son, he opened his eyes to the truth of his vocation, and joined his congratulations to those of the public. We have every reason to think it was the same with Peter Bernardone, despite the silence of the chroniclers on this point. In the history of Peter

Bernardone and M. de Boissy, we have the history of the majority of fathers of families. Parents are always the same; they only admit their children's vocation on condition that it answers the calculations of their ambition. God is set aside.

CHAPTER III.

The Lepers—Francis Restores Three Sanctuaries—His Vocation.

(*1206–1209.*)

Free with the true freedom, that of the children of God, shackled no longer since the scene at the bishop's palace, Francis sought the most solitary places where he could best hear the voice of his Beloved; traversed the woods and mountains situated to the north of Assisi, and, under the action of the divine fire that inflamed him, often sang. It was beautiful to hear him alternate French canticles with the holy King David's cry of gratitude, "Thou hast broken my bonds in sunder; I will offer unto Thee the sacrifice of praise, and will call upon the name of the Lord."* Banditti met him and asked, "Who art thou?" "I am the herald of the Great King!" he replied prophetically. "It's a poor fool!" cried the bandits; and, after cruelly beating him, they flung him into a ditch full of snow, with the ironical adieu, "Remain there, wretched herald of God!"† The robbers once gone, he gets out of the ditch, rejoicing, praying, and chanting; knocks at the door of an adjacent monastery, begs an alms and remains there some days employed in

* Ps. cxv. † Thomas of Celano.

the most menial offices in the kitchen. Thence he repaired to Gubbio, where one of the friends of his childhood, pitying his rags and wretchedness, gives him the ordinary costume of the hermits—short tunic, leathern girdle, shoes, and a staff. It is under this penitential habit we shall see him devote himself to the service of the poor, particularly the lepers.

Although leprosy may have almost entirely disappeared in our days, still it will not be without interest to know what it was in the Middle Ages among Christian peoples. That hideous malady, which covered the whole body of its victims with pustules and bloody scales, then assumed a double character; it was at once contagious and sacred—contagious in pursuance of a mysterious decree of divine justice, and sacred on account of the symbolical part it plays in the Old and New Testaments. Had not Isaias represented the future Messiah as a leper stricken of God and humiliated? And had not the Messiah Himself, during His mortal life, the greatest compassion for the lepers? Dread and veneration! such are the sentiments they inspired in those ages of faith.* The Church, which has the compassion of a mother—a mother ever attentive to the sufferings of her children—composed a special liturgy, one of the most touching, for the lepers. She prayed over them and for them; the ceremonies she employed partook of the sorrows of death and the joys of a religious consecration. The priest took the earth of the cemetery and sprinkled it upon the heads of the sick ones, saying, "Die to the world; live to God!" Then he led them either to a lazar-house or an isolated habitation, easily recognised by the wooden cross planted before the door. In their misfortune they

* Consult *The Leper of the City of Aosta*, by Xavier de Maistre.

were not separated from their wives, because one should not put asunder those whom God had joined. The bishops were specially charged with them, and had to provide for all their wants. The faithful, recognising in these "sick ones of the good God," "the poor of the good God," as they called them—the divine countenance of the Saviour—never passed without dropping a coin into their wooden bowl, and recommending themselves to their prayers. Noble, pure, heroic souls loved to consecrate themselves to their service, and God multiplied miracles to foster this devotion. Nevertheless, however popular it was at the time of the Crusades, Francis, before his conversion, experienced an invincible repugnance to the lepers, the very sight of whom horrified him. Nothing could be more admirable than the way our Lord undertakes to correct and instruct him, and how He ends by establishing the reign of grace on the ruins of nature. The first divine communications date back to the year 1206. A short time after the vision at Spoleto, and about a year before the scene in the episcopal palace, the holy youth while in prayer heard the voice of his Beloved saying to him, "My son, if thou desirest to know My will, thou must despise and hate what thou hast loved and desired according to the flesh. Let not this new path dismay thee; for if the things that please thee should become bitter to thee, those that displease thee will appear sweet and agreeable." He soon had an opportunity of putting in practice these lessons, the counsels of the Divine Master. As he was riding across the plain that extends below Assisi, he perceived a leper advancing towards him. He had a great struggle with himself at this unexpected encounter. His first thought was to go back; but, quickly reverting

to the projects of perfection he was already entertaining, and remembering that the most glorious and difficult of conquests is self-conquest, he overcomes his disgust, alights from his horse, approaches the poor leper, and, kissing his hand, drops a coin into it. Then, remounting, he looks round for the dear pauper of the good God, but in vain; he finds himself alone in the midst of the immense plain. "The Saviour of men often appeared as a leper," he thinks; and, intoxicated with joy and gratitude, falling on his knees he begins to sing the praises of the Lord. At that moment he felt deeply moved, transformed into another man; and subsequently bequeathing this memory as a stimulus to future generations, wrote at the head of his Testament, "From that day what seemed bitterest to me was changed into sweetness for soul and body."

It was a first victory over self, but a decisive victory, as almost always occurs. Still he had not yet quitted the world, and his progress was impeded by material interests and preoccupations. But the year following (1207), when he had made an absolute public abandonment of his patrimony in presence of the Bishop of Assisi, he gave full scope to his desires of sacrifice and self-devotion. We have seen how, on quitting the bishop's palace, he had gone to Gubbio. "There he delighted in living in the lazar-houses and caring for the sick of the good God, washing their feet, cleaning their ulcers, and kissing their most hideous wounds. It was thus he prepared to welcome the angelical physician of souls." * The Most High rewarded this charity by the gift of miracles. Here is the first and perhaps most striking of those prodigies; we select it out of a thousand, unable to relate them all. "An inhabitant of

* S. Bonaventure, chap. ii.

the duchy of Spoleto was attacked with a frightful cancer which was eating away his mouth and cheeks. In vain he had recourse to skilful physicians, in vain he had been to Rome to pray at the tomb of the Apostles: the wound daily increased. Having heard talk of Francis of Assisi, he finds him out; wants to prostrate himself at his feet, but Francis prevents him, clasps him in his arms and kisses his face. Oh, prodigy! the horrible disease disappeared under the saint's lips, and the cure so long prayed for was at last obtained. Indeed, I do not know which one ought most to admire, such a kiss or such a cure!" *

A tender, heroic devotion to the lepers, such is the distinctive characteristic of Francis's conversion; he will preserve it all his life and extend it to his whole order. Let us say at once his example will spread beyond the grated cloister and the limits of Umbria, will diffuse itself far off, like a sweet-scented perfume, and reanimate fervour even in the midst of the world. A legion of heroic souls will follow in his footsteps, and we will see the Louis IX. of France, Henries III. of England, the Elizabeths of Hungary, the Angelas of Foligno, the Maries of Oignies, the Catherines of Sienna, tread the same path, and, like him, esteem it an honour to tend "the sick ones of the good God."

It is generally believed that he spent scarcely more than a month in the lazar-house of Gubbio, and again wended his way towards Assisi in the course of the month of May 1207. The voice of the miraculous picture resounded night and day in his ears, and he felt urged to execute the order he had received to restore the church of S. Damien. Who can depict his emotion when he again caught sight of the walls of his native

* S. Bonaventure, chap. ii.

city, which he had lately dazzled with the splendour of his wealth and learned to know the inconstancy and ingratitude of the world! But, silencing all the memories of the past, and treading upon all the counsels of human wisdom, he entered it as the prophets of the old law entered ungrateful Jerusalem. He went through the streets proclaiming the greatness of God and the sufferings of the Church, begging stones for the love of Jesus Christ, without shame but also without affectation, saying with admirable simplicity, "Whoever will give me one stone, will have one reward; whoever will give me two, will have two; whoever will give me three, will have three." Great was the emotion throughout the whole city. Opinions were divided among his compatriots: the one pursued him with insults and jeers, the others passed on without answering him; but others, too, thinking that such a complete change of life could only be attributed to God, helped him with their own hands or their alms to uplift the ruins of the sanctuary of S. Damien. For his part, he received affronts and offerings with equal gratitude; the affronts for the good of his soul, the offerings for the restoration of the old building. Then they saw the young man of good family, accustomed to the pleasures of life, bearing upon his shoulders, like a workman, the materials necessary for the building. He worked without ceasing, so that his limbs, worn by fasts and penitential rigours, bent under the burden. The priest, Dom Pietro, who ministered in this church, took pity on him; and, notwithstanding his slender resources, prepared a good meal for him at the close of each day. Francis at first accepted this generous hospitality; but, after a few days, he began to reflect, "Francis, will you find a priest who will

receive you so cordially everywhere? Is this the poverty you have chosen for your companion? Go, henceforth, and beg from door to door like the poor, porringer in hand, to gather the broken victuals they will give you; for it is thus you must live for the love of Him who was born poor, lived in poverty, was nailed naked to the Cross, and buried in a borrowed tomb." The next day he goes in quest of his food, and sits down in the street to take his meal. At the sight of this disgusting mess he feels his stomach kicking and involuntarily turns away his eyes; but triumphing at once over this repugnance, as he triumphed over others, he begins to eat with a relish. He afterwards declared that he had never had a more delicious feast. In the evening he said gaily to Dom Pietro, "Don't trouble yourself any more about my food; I have found an excellent housekeeper and a very clever cook who is a capital hand at seasoning meats." *

Mention is here made of Peter Bernardone, and for the last time in the course of this history; alas! we must add that it is not to his credit. Understanding nothing of the mysterious calls of grace or the holy follies of the Cross, he was extremely irritated at seeing his son clad as a beggar and become the object of public derision. If he happened to meet him, he turned angrily aside; he sometimes even went so far as to curse him. The heart is wrung at such a thought! No doubt Heaven did not ratify the father's maledictions; but they wounded the tender and sensitive soul of the son so acutely that long after this dolorous plaint escaped from him, "Of all the pains I have had to endure this was to me the bitterest." To apply a balm to this bleeding wound, he stopped an old

* *Legend of the Three Companions.*

beggar, and said to him, "Come, I will be your son; every time my natural father curses me, you, my adopted father, will give me your blessing." And the old man promptly obeyed him.*

Angelo, our saint's only brother, seems to have inherited both his father's fortune and his harshness, as the following incident proves. One cold winter's day our saint was praying in a church, shivering with the cold, in his old hermit's habit. Angelo, passing close by, said jeeringly to one of his friends, "Go, ask him to sell you some drops of his sweat!" "No," replied Francis in French, "I shall not sell my sweat to men; I shall sell it at a higher price to God!" †

In the midst of such trials, our saint courageously laboured on with the gentle joy of the dove building its nest in solitude for its little ones. "Come," he cried to the passers by, "help me to finish; for you will see a convent of poor ladies, whose holy life and reputation will cause the Heavenly Father to be glorified throughout the entire Church, flourish here"—a prophecy which was realised five years afterwards, when Clare and her companions settled in this place.‡

Thus Francis finished the year 1207 in labour, prayer, and the most absolute denudation. The church of S. Damien once completed, he undertook to repair two other sanctuaries, situated like the first at the gates of Assisi. One was dedicated to S. Peter, and our saint, who had a very tender devotion to the Prince of the Apostles, wanted to begin the year 1208 by the restoration of this edifice, a restoration which took a very short time, thanks to the abundant alms of his fellow-citizens. The other was a very poor and a very old chapel. Built in the year 352 by some holy hermits

* *Legend of the Three Companions.* † *Ibid.* ‡ *Ibid.*

from Palestine, occupied by the Benedictines since the middle of the sixth century, it had been by turns called S. Mary of Josaphat, on account of a precious relic taken from the sepulchre of the Blessed Virgin; then Portiuncula, because it stood upon a plot of ground belonging to the Benedictines of Monte Subiaco; and finally S. Mary of Angels, in consequence of frequent heavenly apparitions. Formerly a celebrated place of pilgrimage, but for the moment abandoned, it went to ruin, and its dilapidated walls sheltered the shepherds and their flocks in bad weather. Our saint displayed all the resources of his zeal to rescue such a venerable sanctuary from popular oblivion and the outrages of time. Before the close of the year 1208, he had restored it to its olden worship and primitive splendour.

Of the three temples he had repaired the man of God preferred Portiuncula; it was his favourite oratory and habitual dwelling. Taking the Queen of Angels for his advocate, humbly kneeling before her image, he supplicated her day and night to teach him the ways of perfection in which he was to walk. For two years, it is true, he had followed all the movements of grace, but without any presentiment of his future vocation, like those bold mariners who fearlessly cruise over unexplored oceans seeking for a port where they may cast anchor. God at last showed him that long-wished-for port. In the month of February 1209, Francis, kneeling in his favourite sanctuary, was assisting at the holy sacrifice of the Mass, which Don Pietro was offering, at his request, in honour of the Apostles. During the reading of the Gospel, when he heard these words, "Do not possess gold, nor silver, nor money in your purses; nor scrip for your journey,

nor two coats, nor shoes, nor a staff," * they were like a ray of light to him. He saw clearly that the port for him was the religious life, and that his special vocation was apostolic poverty. Then his eyes brightened, and his face became radiant. "Here is what I sought!" he cried; "here is what I longed for!" In that very instant he flings away his purse, his staff, his shoes with horror, puts on a coarse tunic of ashen grey, and sets out for Assisi barefooted, his loins girt with a cord, to preach penance, and conquer souls for Jesus Christ.†

Marvellous power of the Word of God! In the third century a young Egyptian noble, S. Anthony, hears this passage of the Gospel, "If thou wouldst be perfect, go, sell all thou hast and give it to the poor," and, putting this counsel into practice, becomes the father of the monastic life in the East. Ten centuries later, Francis, the son of a merchant of Assisi, hears another word of the Gospel read, feels himself, in turn, subjugated by grace, and becomes the father of the most perfect religious life in the West. On that day were celebrated the mystical nuptials of the Seraphic Patriarch with Holy Poverty, and the Order of Friars Minors was born.

Francis's first sermons were as successful as his quests. He procured many affronts for himself and a few souls for God, but beautiful souls, as we shall soon see! He continued this kind of life for nearly two months, dividing his time between prayer and the

* Matt. x. 9, 10.

† *The Legend of the Three Companions.* For the conversion and vocation of S. Francis we have followed the chronology of the Bollandists, which perfectly agrees with that of Bernard of Besse.

ministry of the Word, and daily receiving the hospitality of the chaplain of S. Damien's.

From that time Our Lady of Angels had a special attraction for him. There he meditated more at his ease upon the Passion of the Divine Master, and tasted all its sorrows; and, when he found himself alone, giving full vent to the grief that weighed upon him, groaned and sobbed aloud. One of his former friends, having one day overheard his cries of distress, entered the chapel, and, surprised to see him bathed in tears, asked, "What is the cause of your grief?" "Ah! I am weeping over the passion of my Lord Jesus Christ," replied Francis, "and I would not be ashamed to weep over it before the whole world!"* Beautiful expression, well worthy of so tender and loving a heart, and which in Francis's mouth was equal to a prophecy.

We have traversed the period of our saint's solitary life, which corresponds to the hidden life of Jesus at Nazareth; we are now going to enter upon his public life, and consider, in the course of events, the dominant influence he exercised over the Church and mediæval society.

* *Legend of the Three Companions.*

CHAPTER IV.

Beginning of the Order of Friars Minors—S. Mary of Angels—Missionary Enterprises.

(*1209–1212.*)

There are two things in the divine order that add an unparalleled ray of grandeur to the brow of man—the glory of the apostolate, and that of being founder of an Order. Happy the souls whom God marks out for the respect and veneration of peoples by one or other of those excellent gifts! Now S. Francis has the rare privilege of crowning himself with both these incomparable glories; and we shall see resplendent in him all the self-devotion of an apostle and all the creative energy of the founder.

He was not only the perfect imitator of the Apostles, but of the Saviour Himself. Like Him, he first evangelised his native country; and, like Him, received many affronts for himself and many souls for his Heavenly Father. Another trait of resemblance still more striking and unique in history: he gathered round him twelve disciples, who, like the disciples of the Divine Master, were the columns of the Franciscan edifice, and filled the world with the renown of their miracles and the perfume of their virtues, shining like stars in the firmament of the Church, and forming a luminous aureola around their seraphic Father. How could one pass by those angelic figures, whenever history brings them before us, without their arresting his gaze for a moment?

It was the glory of Assisi to have furnished Francis with his first companions. At their head appears Bernard of Quintavalle, a learned and prudent man, scion of one of the noblest and richest families of that city, where he enjoyed great authority. Witness for two years of the actions of Bernardone's son, and seeing his contempt for the goods and vanities of the world, he wished to contemplate his virtue nearer, and perhaps put it to the test. He invited the saint one evening to share his meal and pass the night under his roof. After supper, Bernard gave him a bed in his own room; and, when night came, feigned sleep and began to snore loudly, while in reality he was observing every movement of his guest by the aid of the lamplight. Deceived by this pious artifice, Francis rose, knelt upon the bare ground, and, with arms extended, eyes upturned, and face bathed in tears, repeated these words during the whole night, *Deus meus et omnia!* ("My God and my all!") Bernard was deeply moved at such a sight. "Truly," said he to himself, "this is a man of God." At daybreak he called Francis and put this question to him, "If a servant had for many years received a treasure from his master, and, before the term assigned, no longer needed it, what should he do?" "Restore it to his master." "Now I am this servant, God has entrusted me with immense wealth, far beyond my deserts; I want to restore it to Him, and replace it in His hands to follow you." Francis was rejoiced to see the Lord send him such a worthy subject to lay the foundation of his work. "Brother," said he, "it is no light project! We must consult God; let us go to the church, hear Holy Mass, and the Holy Spirit will show us what we have to do." The next day they repaired to the church of S.

Nicholas. They were joined on the way by a Canon of the cathedral, Peter of Catana, a man of eminent learning and sanctity. After Mass, the priest who ministered at S. Nicholas's opened the book of the Holy Gospels thrice, according to the custom of the time. The first time he read these words, "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor;"* the second, "Take nothing for the way;"† the third, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me."‡

"Brethren," said Francis to his two companions, "there is our life, there is our rule and that of those who will join us! Go, then, and do what you have heard."§ It was on April 16, 1209. Both went, sold their goods, gave the price to the poor, and then came back to the holy founder, never more to leave him. After clothing them with a habit like his, Francis hastily constructed a little cabin under the shadow of Portiuncula, to live there along with them under the eyes of Our Lady of Angels.|| It is there we will find him again presently; but, first, let us say a word or two about the privileged men whom Heaven gave him for his first disciples.

Model of patience and humility, favoured with the most precious gifts, transported by the hands of angels from one bank to the other of a great river in Spain—the Ebro;—often rapt in ecstasy in the midst of the forests of the Apennines, child beloved of God and His

* Matt. xix. † Mark vi. ‡ Matt. xvi.

§ All this narrative is from Bernard of Besse, except the few lines about the vocation of Peter of Catana, which are taken from the *Legend of the Three Companions.*

|| *Legend of the Three Companions*, of S. Bonaventure, and of Bernard of Besse.

servant Francis, who called him his first-born—such was Bernard of Quintavalle. Upon his deathbed he said to his afflicted brethren, "Dear brethren, console yourselves. I would not for a thousand worlds have served another master than Our Lord Jesus Christ! And now, upon the point of leaving you, I ask of you two things: be mindful of my soul before God, and, above all, love one another, according to the example which I have given you." At that hour all the joy of heaven seemed reflected in his countenance, and his soul fled to the bosom of God. It was the 12th of July 1241. The religious deposited the holy man's body alongside the remains of S. Francis.

As to Peter of Catana, he had the honour of being the first Vicar-General of the Order. After a life full of work and merits, he passed quietly away at Our Lady of Angels on March 2, 1224. Obedience was always his favourite virtue; it accompanied him beyond the tomb. As startling miracles daily took place there, and the throng of visitors disturbed their retreat, the holy founder leant upon the tomb and said to him, "Brother Peter, you always obeyed me during life; I wish you would obey me likewise now. Those who crowd here greatly incommode us: they cause poverty to be violated and silence badly observed. I command you, then, in the name of holy obedience, to cease working miracles." The Son of God acquiesced in the wish of His faithful servant, and from that day no more miracles took place upon the tomb of the Blessed Peter of Catana. This eternal silence, suddenly occurring after so many prodigies, contained an important lesson which all the disciples of our saint comprehended. They understood that God thus manifested the value He attaches to

religious obedience, and displayed more and more zeal in the observance of this virtue.

The third disciple of S. Francis was Giles or Ægidius, an upright man and fearing God, of an honourable family of Assisi. Hearing of the conversion of his two friends, Bernard of Quintavalle and Peter of Catana, he conceived the project of imitating them, but knew not where their retreat was. On the morning of the 23d of April, the Feast of S. George, after hearing Holy Mass in the church of that name, he took to the road, trusting in the goodness of Providence for the success of this step, and went straight to the humble cabin of Portiuncula. Francis, who was praying in an adjacent wood, came to meet him; and Giles, prostrating himself at his feet, humbly begged to be admitted into his company. "Brother," replied the saint, "you ask the Lord to receive you as His servant and His knight: that is no small favour! If the Emperor was passing through Assisi and was pleased to select a favourite, every one would say, 'Pray heaven it may be me!' How much more ought you bless the Great King of heaven for having cast His eyes upon you?" Then, raising him up, he embraced him affectionately and presented him to Bernard and Peter, saying, "Here is a good brother whom God sends us." After a modest refection together, the holy founder, followed by his new disciple, directed his steps towards Assisi, with the object of procuring him a habit like his own. On the way they met a woman asking alms. Francis, turning towards Giles, said, with an angelic expression, "Brother, give this poor woman the cloak you are wearing, for the love of God." Giles immediately gave it, and the alms appeared to him to ascend to heaven. With hearts inundated with joy they

pursued their way, begged some coarse stuff in the town, and came back to Our Lady of Angels. Giles received the habit from the hands of the holy founder, and from that time completely abandoned to him the guidance of his soul. Although simple and illiterate, the third companion of Francis is one of the most charming figures of the Franciscan family. The Seraphic Patriarch, admiring his spirit of abnegation, said of him, alluding to the romances of chivalry, "He is one of my paladins of the Table Round." S. Bonaventure's testimony is still more explicit: "I saw him with my own eyes, and more than once," he writes, "rapt in ecstasy; and I do not think I am going too far in affirming that he led the life of an angel rather than that of a man." All the divine perfections were reflected in his soul as in a pure crystal. None of S. Francis's companions, perhaps, enjoyed more habitually the delights of contemplation; none united to heavenly gifts more candour and amiable simplicity.

One day he went to find S. Bonaventure, then Minister-General of the Order, and said to him, "Father, God has showered gifts of grace upon you; but we, simple and ignorant as we are, what shall we do to be saved?" "Brother," replied the Seraphic Doctor, "if God only gave you His love, it would be enough for your salvation." "But, father," continued Giles with charming simplicity, "can an ignorant man love God as much as a learned man?" "Assuredly," replied the father; "and a poor old woman can love God as much and more than a doctor of theology." Brother Giles, unable to repress his enthusiasm, at once rushes into the garden, and, turning towards the city, begins to cry out lustily, "Poor, simple,

ignorant women, love the Lord your God, and you may become greater than Brother Bonaventure."

Another time, a Dominican religious, a doctor of theology, long tortured by a doubt upon the virginity of the Mother of God, came to the humble friar. The Blessed Giles was miraculously informed of it, went to meet him, and, without giving him time to speak, said, striking the ground with his stick, "Friar Preacher, Mary was a virgin before childbirth;" and that very moment a fair lily rose out of the earth. Again striking the ground, he continued, "Friar Preacher, Mary was a virgin in childbirth;" a second lily rose from the ground. And, striking the ground for the third and last time with his staff, he cried, "Friar Preacher, Mary was a virgin after childbirth;" and a third lily of dazzling whiteness like the two first stood before them. And the Dominican religious, struck none the less by the authority of his word than the triple miracle of the lilies, withdrew with that divine peace of the soul he had until then sought in vain.

Who does not know the interview of Friar Giles with S. Louis? The King of France, having come to visit the tomb of the Seraphic Patriarch, wanted first of all to see the Blessed Fra Egidio. He repairs to Perugia incognito, and inquires for him at the convent. God revealed to the saint who his august visitor was. He immediately descends to the parlour, and both saints, as if they had been the oldest and closest friends, threw themselves into each other's arms, and remained for a long time without uttering a single word. The next day, when the other religious reproached him for having received a King of France so badly, "Brethren," he replied, "the divine light revealed to us each other's hearts with much more

clearness and consolation than if we had spoken, so powerless is the human tongue to speak the mysteries of God." *

Pope Gregory IX., full of esteem and veneration for Friar Giles, begged him one day to tell him frankly what he ought to do. "Holy Father," replied the saint, "keep the eyes of your mind always pure: the right eye to contemplate the beauties of the other world and the perfections of God; the left eye to see clearly the things of earth confided to your solicitude." He continued in this strain, and the Sovereign Pontiff, hanging upon his words, admired the treasures of wisdom God had poured into the soul of the humble friar.

Brother Giles closed his long career (1262) at Perugia, on the Feast of S. George, the anniversary of his reception at Our Lady of Angels, after fifty-two years of religious life. Numerous miracles worked upon his tomb openly attested his sanctity.†

Such were Francis's three companions. The holy founder knew how to appreciate the treasures God sent him at the first glance, and wished to avail of them for the salvation of souls. Was not the hour come for those new knights of Christ to enter the lists in their turn and fight the good fight of the Lord? He therefore sent Bernard and Peter early in May into the Romagna, while he himself went with Giles in the direction of the March of Ancona. This first apostolic journey helped to bring to light all their heroic virtue. Destitute of everything, often even of the necessaries of life, scouted by the populace, covered with mud, they were happy to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, it was only a trial; and, after a dozen

* Bernard of Besse.—*Chronicle.*

† His feast is fixed for April 23.

days, they returned to their dear solitude to gain renewed strength in silence, prayer, and mortification.

There was no fear vocations would be wanting. The perfume diffused by Our Lady of Angels was too pure and fragrant not to attract a crowd of souls, enamoured, like Francis, with the love of God, and with a holy hunger of humiliations. Before the end of a month, three new disciples placed themselves under his guidance. To our great regret we can hardly give a list of them, having gathered little information of them individually.

The fourth companion of the servant of God was Sabbatino,* the fifth Morico or Maurice of the Order of the Holy Cross. Sick in the hospital of S. Saviour, and without hope of cure, Morico thought of recommending himself to the prayers of Francis. His confidence was not deceived. The saint prayed for him; then, dipping a bit of bread in the oil of the lamp of Our Lady of Angels, he sent two of his brethren with this remedy to him, telling them, "Take this to our dear brother Morico; the power of Jesus Christ will not only restore him to perfect health, but it will also make him a valiant soldier, who will enter our militia and persevere therein." The prophecy was fulfilled to the letter.†

Is there anything more delightful than to read the narrative of the origin of the Order in the contemporary authors? One would think he had discovered a page of the Gospel or the Acts of the Apostles, lost

* Sabbatino died holily in the convent of Ara-Cœli at Rome, February 2, 1252.—*Wadding.*

† Morico ended his long and holy career at the convent of Orvieto on the 30th of March 1236. The canons regular of the Holy Cross honoured him with a public cultus, and celebrated his feast on March 30.

for centuries. At a sign from Francis, as formerly at a sign from the Saviour, disciples flocked round him. The illusion is complete, same number, same virtues, same miracles, in this new apostolic college as in the first. Nothing is wanting, not even, alas! the treason of Judas! This Judas was the sixth companion of Francis, and was called John of Capella. Charged with the duty of distributing the alms to the brethren, he gradually became attached to temporal goods, acquired worldly tastes, and lost the spirit of prayer and poverty. In vain the Seraphic Father warned him of the peril his soul was incurring; in vain he tried, sometimes by paternal exhortations, sometimes by sharp reprimands, to lead him back to the way of abnegation; in vain menaced him with the chastisements of heaven. John only hearkened to the voice of passion. Then, according to the prediction of the man of God, the divine justice flashed forth, prompt and terrible. A frightful leprosy covered the whole body of the guilty man, torturing him day and night. He had not the courage to bear this trial, threw off the holy habit of penance, returned to the world, and, giving way to despair, hanged himself like Judas. It was in the year 1212. One of the foundation-stones of the edifice had tumbled into the abyss. Francis, then in Rome, was overwhelmed with grief when he heard this sad news; like the old patriarch Jacob, he would not be consoled. His companions dared not speak to him,—when a new postulant knocked at the door: it was a son from distant England. His entrance into the Order coincided too well with the apostasy of John of Capella not to see in it the loving care of Providence. At that very instant, and with a common accord, it was resolved that Friar

William should take the place of the sixth companion among the twelve, as formerly Matthias took the place of the perfidious disciple. Thus was completed the resemblance between the foundation of the new Order and that of the Apostolic College.

In the year 1209 the work of God was still only *en germe*, and the family of the Patriarch of Assisi more fervent than numerous. Francis, considering holy poverty as the most precious pearl of the Gospel, and the keystone of his edifice, strove above all to fortify his disciples in the practice of this virtue. He therefore sent them to beg from door to door in Assisi, where they received more outrages than alms; and their relations were not the last to turn them into ridicule. He himself went to the bishop, who, dismayed at their mode of life, said kindly, "It is too hard, my son, to renounce everything in this way!" "For my part," replied the servant of God, "I find it much more troublesome to possess something; for one cannot hold property without burdening himself with cares, quarrels, and lawsuits; one must sometimes even have recourse to arms to defend it; and all that generally extinguishes the love of God and our neighbours." The reply pleased the prelate, who reiterated the assurance of his protection to the poor of Jesus Christ.*

That clear-sightedness, that legislative capacity we admire in S. Francis, he derived not less from his natural lights than in his inner converse with the august Prisoner of our tabernacles. He never ceased to implore the help of Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and often cried aloud, "There is nothing on earth I am not ready to cheerfully abandon,

* *Legend of the Three Companions.*

nothing so hard or so painful I would not joyfully endure, for the glory of my Lord Jesus Christ; and I wish, as much as I can, to excite all men to love God with their whole heart, and above all things." And, in return, the God-Man, who loves to shower down His gifts upon those who invoke Him, enlightened his intelligence and strengthened his will in the love of good.

Towards the close of spring (1209) the holy founder descended with his little troop into the valley of Rieti. He halted at a solitary rock in view of Poggio-Bastone; a hermit's grotto he saw there, and which was then deserted, seemed to him favourable to meditation on the eternal truths; and it was thither, after having, along with his brethren, preached and begged in Poggio-Bastone and the neighbourhood, he returned to pass the night. Now, one day as he was praying upon this rock, pondering in the bitterness of his soul on his years of youthful folly, he was in rapt ecstasy, when the Holy Spirit revealed to Him two things equally consoling: the entire and plenary remission of all the sins of his life, and the prodigious extension of his Order. In the evening, when the pious missionaries returned, he said to them in a tone of inspiration, "Take courage, my dear children, rejoice in the Lord! Let not your fewness sadden you; let not my simplicity and yours alarm you; for God has revealed to me that by His blessing He will propagate this family, of which He is the Father, in every part of the world. I would wish to be silent upon what I have seen, but charity obliges me to tell you. I have seen a great multitude coming to us to take the same habit and lead the same life. I have seen all the roads thronged with men hastening thither, Frenchmen running, Spaniards rush-

ing, English and Germans following close behind—every nation was moved; and, lo! the sound of the footsteps of those who are going and coming to execute the orders of holy obedience still resounds in my ears."* Thus chanted the prophet Isaias when, six centuries beforehand, he announced the establishment and miraculous propagation of the Church. The analogy is striking, and all the historians of the Order have seized it.

During the few days Francis passed in this hermitage of Poggio-Bastone, a crowd of visitors flocked thither, drawn by the perfume of sanctity it exhaled. One of them, touched by grace, asked to be enrolled in the militia of the poor of Jesus Christ. It was Philip, surnamed the Long on account of his height. The holy founder made him his seventh disciple.†

After this conquest he brought them to S. Mary of Angels to form them to the religious life. What progress they were to make in the school of such a master! One evening he gathered them round him, and, standing in their midst, let fall from his lips the most profound teachings about their future mission, and the way they should fulfil it. It was, if we may be allowed this comparison with the Gospel, his sermon on the mount; and it is as such his three companions have bequeathed it to future generations. "Brethren," said he, "consider what our vocation is. It is not only for our salvation that God, in His mercy, has called us; it is also for the salvation of peoples. It is that we should go forth to exhort all sinners, by our example more than by our words, to do penance and keep the

* Thomas of Celano; Bernard of Besse.

† Philip the Long died at Mont-Ferrand on the 20th of March 1252. Let us say here, once for all, that the old authors give the title of "Blessed" to the twelve companions of S. Francis, except John of Capella.

divine precepts. We look contemptible, and they treat us as madmen; but fear not, take courage, and have confidence that our Lord, who has conquered the world, will speak efficaciously through us. Let us beware, after having quitted everything, of losing the kingdom of heaven for mere trifles. If we find money anywhere, let us think no more of it than the dust of the highroad. Beware of judging and despising the rich who live in softness and dress sumptuously, for God is their Lord as well as ours; He may call them and justify them. We should honour them as our brethren and our masters: our brethren, because we have all the same Creator, our masters, because by their succour they help good people. Go, then, announce peace to men, and preach penance for the remission of sins. Some will receive you with joy and listen to you willingly; others, impious, proud, and violent, will blame you and rise up against you. Bear everything with patience; let nothing intimidate you. In a short time, many nobles and learned men will join us to preach before kings and peoples. Be patient in tribulation, fervent in prayer, courageous in trial, modest in speech, grave in your manners, grateful for the good that will be done you; and the kingdom of God, which is eternal, will be your reward."

All bow obedience to his word, kiss his feet as the representative of God, and await his orders. Francis portions out the world to them in the form of a cross, sends them two by two in three different directions, reserving the fourth for himself and his companion, and saying to each of them individually, "Cast thy care upon the Lord, and He shall nourish thee." *

Let us for a moment in thought follow the footsteps

* Ps. liv.

of those angels of peace and benediction. To all whom they met they addressed this salutation their blessed Father had taught them, "May the Lord give you His peace!" As soon as they perceived a church, their first care was to go and prostrate themselves therein, and recite that beautiful prayer they had likewise learned from S. Francis, "We adore You, O Lord Jesus Christ, here and in all Your churches all over the earth, and bless You for having redeemed the world by Your holy Cross." Were they asked what was their country and profession, they answered humbly, "We are penitents come from Assisi;" * for they did not venture yet to call themselves religious. Their preaching was simple and unstudied; they contented themselves with briefly reminding people of the way to heaven. They gratefully accepted the bread that was offered them, but never gold or silver; prayed for their persecutors; and when they found themselves homeless, rejoiced at possessing this trait of resemblance in common with Him who had not a stone whereon to lay His head.

This mission, like the two previous ones, was of short duration. Francis, guided by the Divine Master, first returned to his dear dwelling of Portiuncula, where he received three new disciples: John of Saint Constant, Barbari, and Bernard of Viridante.

Still the blessed Father, wishful of seeing his little family, begged the Saviour to gather them around him. His wish was heard, and a few days after, to their great astonishment, the missionaries all arrived together at Portiuncula. Considering their number and their fervour, and judging that the moment was

* *Legend of the Three Companions.*

come to regularly constitute them into a religious family, he assembled his companions, and said, "Dear brethren, you see how our young society grows and multiplies with the blessing of God. We must, consequently, select a form of life and submit it to the judgment of the Holy See; for, as to what concerns matters of faith and religious orders, I am persuaded nothing stable can be done without its consent and approval. Let us go, then, to our Mother the holy Roman Church, and give an account to the Sovereign Pontiff of what the Lord has already done by our ministry, in order that we may pursue the work we have begun according to his will and under his orders." *

There indeed was the holy Patriarch of Assisi with his filial devotion to the See of Peter, as well as that pure faith which sees in the Papacy the focus of light, the foundation-stone of the Catholic Church, the infallible interpreter of the holy Gospel, the guardian of every interest, and the hope of the future! No ecclesiastical law then obliged the religious orders to ask this approval from Rome, which was only imposed six years later at the fourth Council of Lateran; but the holy founder knew that other columns of the Church may crumble, and that to Peter alone it was said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." His plan was as simple as profound. To plant the Cross in all hearts, to place it upon the summit of the social edifice, and for that purpose muster and discipline all the elements of good into a permanent army with the Vicar of Jesus Christ as their chief; such, in a few words, was the project he

* *Legend of the Three Companions.*

conceived, and to the success of which he consecrated all the rest of his life! Whether one recognises in that a stroke of genius, or the result of a divine inspiration, it little matters. The consequences are the same. He thus placed his children for ever under the obligation of receiving the pure doctrine of the Gospel from the lips of Peter; thus ensured them the benefit of pontifical infallibility and the immortal duration of the Church. Might we not even add that by unity of belief he laid the first stone of that liturgical unity of which we now realise the benefit? *

His companions, sharing his views and expectations, applauded his proposition. The saint immediately wrote a Rule in twenty-three chapters, a Rule which, besides the three ordinary vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity, prescribed the express and absolute renunciation of every possession, and the engagement to live upon alms. As soon as it was drawn up (probably towards the close of June or early in July 1209), they all took the road to Rome under the guidance, not of S. Francis, too humble to put himself forward, but of Brother Bernard of Quintavalle. What a beautiful sight it was to see those ten pilgrims following their blessed Father as the Apostles followed the Saviour along the highways of Judea, walking barefooted, without purse or staff, under the rays of a burning sun, and beguiling the weary way by fervent prayers or pious conversation!

We have only two incidents to note in this journey. The first is the conversion of Angelo Tancredi. Walking through the streets of Rieti, Francis meets a brilliant cavalier, and, without ever having known

* *Lex credendi, lex orandi:* the law of beliefs and that of prayer are both correlative. —*S. Augustin.*

him, accosts him, and says, "Brother Angelo, you have long borne the baldrick, sword, and spurs. You must now for baldrick have a coarse cord, for sword the Cross of Jesus Christ, for spurs dust and mud. Follow me, and I will make you a soldier of Jesus Christ." The valiant cavalier immediately joins the blessed phalanx of the soldiers of Christ, in which he takes the rank and title of eleventh companion of S. Francis.*

The second incident was a consoling vision in which God showed the holy founder the Papacy under the semblance of a palm-tree, whose branches graciously bowed down to him. This apparition filled him with joy, and the recital of it reanimated his brethren's courage.

CHAPTER V.

INNOCENT III.—RIVO TORTO—S. MARY OF ANGELS—SYLVESTER—FIRST FLOWERS OF THE NOVICIATE: RUFFINO, LEO, MASSEO, AND JUNIPER.

(*1209–1211.*)

THE twelfth century had just expired and vanished into the night of time—century of mud and blood, when darkness prevailed over light, evil over good, the flesh over the spirit. People groaned under the weight of the incessant strugles that ensanguined Europe. The Church mourned and wept, striving in vain to stem the impure waves of scandal which, ever rising, invaded even the threshold of the sanctuary. A famous

* It is the rank Bernard of Besse and Bartholomew of Pisa assign him.

heresy put the climax on all these evils and threatened to destroy everything—the heresy of the Albigenses. These sectaries, who had covered the whole soil of Southern France with blood and ruins, extended their ramifications to Italy under the name of Paterins, Cathari, and Vaudois. The reader knows their teaching substantially; it was the sum of all the errors past sects had by turns trailed after them like an impure slime. Starting with this idea, that there are two Gods, one good, the other bad, and that the second is the author of creation, they were to logically end in a brutal fatalism which destroyed the responsibility of conscience and in the most revolting sensualism. They formed more than one school: it was a society skilfully organised which grew in the shade and was beginning to assume a position in the sunlight of Christian Europe. Protected by obligatory secrecy against public opinion and public prosecution, backed up by the Emperor of Germany, who found them very convenient partisans against the Holy See, and thinking they were on the eve of a definitive triumph, they finally raised the mask and openly proclaimed their pretensions. They paraded their scandals under the eyes of the people, multiplied ruins, and despoiled the clergy of their possessions, rights, and immunities; and then, as now, the whole world resounded with their declamations against the Roman Church, which they called the great Prostitute of Babylon, and their prophecies about its speedy downfall. This shows they were the worthy descendants of the Manicheans and the worthy ancestors of the Freemasons of our days; so true is it that error is always the same, and that hatred is its indelible mark, as love is the inimitable sign of truth!

Thus, decadence was everywhere, and the Christian world was going to ruin. But why despair, when the Word Incarnate, vanquisher of death and hell, has promised to assist His Church and guard its immortal destinies? The hour of despondency is God's hour *par excellence*, that is to say, the moment for Him to reveal Himself and save what seemed lost! And to work this wonder in the social order He need only produce a phenomenon like that He daily produces in the depths of the ocean. There, the wind suddenly blows, the sea rises, and soon its waves have covered the sands of the sea-shore. It is the same thing in the moral order: at a given moment God sends a divine in-breathing that moves the masses, urges them towards Christ, and renews the face of the earth. This divine breath was then passing over Western Europe, and suddenly there appeared, like so many liberators, Innocent III. in the See of Rome, Louis IX. upon the throne of France, Elizabeth of Hungary in Germany. At the same time, to distinctly mark His intervention by the contrast between the weakness of the means and the grandeur of the results, God raised up two providential men, one in Spain, the other in Italy, Dominic and Francis, two paupers who, unknown to each other, were pursuing the same aim: reforming the world by the spirit of sacrifice, opposing humility to pride, evangelical poverty to the love of wealth, charity to selfishness. Was not the divine plan sublime enough, merciful enough? Its accomplishment will not be less admirable, as we shall see.

At Rome, Francis had the good fortune to find the old Bishop of Assisi, who received him most affectionately and obtained him the protection of two very influential cardinals, John of S. Paul, Bishop of Sabina,

and Ugolino, the Pope's nephew, and, later on, Pope himself under the name of Gregory IX. Still the same Providence that procured him the support of two such eminent personages, reserved for him a slight humiliation to increase his merits. The first audience he had at the Lateran palace was not favourable. Innocent III., thinking, perhaps, of the false poor of Lyons,* whose pride and crimes still troubled the south of France, took this poor man for an importunate beggar, and sent him away without a hearing. But the following night he had a mysterious dream; he saw at his feet a palm gradually grow up and become a fine tree. He inquired the meaning of this vision, and God gave him to understand that this palm was the emblem of the poor man he had repulsed the day before. On awaking he gave orders that this stranger should be immediately sought out. They found the humble pilgrim in one of the wards of the hospital of S. Anthony, and brought him to the Lateran palace. In this second audience Innocent III., a pontiff whose wisdom was only equalled by his virtue, received him in the midst of the cardinals, and heard him with marked favour. Admiring the saint's candour, courage, and zeal, he was inclined to grant him his request, when several members of the Sacred College represented to His Holiness that this institute would be an innovation in the Church, and that this mode of life was beyond human strength. Then Cardinal John of S. Paul replied with much pertinency, "Your Eminences, if we reject this poor man's request on the pretext that his Rule is novel and too difficult, let us beware of attacking the Gospel itself, since the Rule he presents for the approbation of the

* The Vaudois, so called from the chief of their sect, Peter Valdo, a Lyons merchant and native of Vaux in Dauphiné.

Holy Father is conformable to the teachings of the Gospel; for, to sustain that evangelical perfection, or the vow of practising it, contains anything unreasonable, is to blaspheme against Jesus Christ, the Author of the Gospel."

Struck with the appropriateness of these reasons, the Sovereign Pontiff says to Francis, "My son, pray to Jesus Christ to make known to us His will, in order that we may meet your wishes." The servant of God obeyed with the simplicity of a child; he went and prayed, and then, returning, proposed the following parable:—"Most Holy Father, there was once a very beautiful but poor girl who lived in a desert. A great King saw her, and was so enamoured of her beauty that he took her to wife. He lived some years with her, and had by her children who united their father's features to their mother's beauty; then he returned to his palace. The mother reared her children very carefully; and, when they were grown up, spoke to them in these terms, 'My children, you were born of a great King; go to his court, and he will receive you with all the regard due to your birth.' The children, then, came to the King's court. The latter, seeing the beauty of their countenances, said to them, 'Whose sons are you?' 'We are the sons of that poor woman who lives in the desert,' they replied. The King at once affectionately embraced them, saying, 'Fear not, you are my sons, and if I feed my officers with meats from my table, how much more careful should I be of you who are my children!'

"This King, Most Holy Father, is Our Lord Jesus Christ; this amiable and beautiful girl is Poverty, who, despised by every one, found herself in this world as in a desert. The King of kings, descending from

the height of heaven and coming down upon earth, so loved her that He married her in the crib. He had several children by her in the world's wilderness—apostles, anchorites, cenobites, and finally, in the unhappy times we are passing through, your little servant and his disciples. And He Himself assured me that He would provide for our subsistence, as He provided for our elder brethren; and He told me, 'If I feed mercenaries, and even the enemies of My Name, with how much more reason shall I take care of those who are My sons and heirs! And if I cause My sun to shine upon sinners and distribute to them the goods of the earth, with how much more reason shall I give their daily bread to those who make a vow of following the Gospel counsels!'"

"Ah! truly, there is the man who will uphold the Church of God by his teaching and his works!" cried the Pope, alluding to a vision he had had a few days before and was pleased to relate in presence of the cardinals. "It seemed to me," said he, "that the basilica of S. John Lateran was tottering upon its foundation, and I was trying in vain to prevent it falling, when a poor, miserable man came forward and propped it up with his shoulders." Without further deliberation he approved by word of mouth of the Rule of S. Francis, made him Superior-General of the Friars Minors present and future, conferred the diaconate on the holy founder and the monastic tonsure on his eleven companions, gave them free leave to preach penance everywhere, received them to the religious profession, gave them his apostolic benediction, and, having tenderly embraced them all, sent them away.*

* *Legends of S. Bonaventura and the Three Companions.*

All our pious pilgrim's wishes were realised; seraphic poverty, that absolute poverty they had embraced, had received the solemn approbation of the highest tribunal in the world. So, their first thought was to go and prostrate themselves in thanksgiving at the tomb of the Apostles. Finally, they quitted the Eternal City, filled with great consolation and still greater hopes, and swearing an unbounded and undying devotion to the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

S. Bonaventure relates a charming incident which signalised their return. One evening, exhausted with fatigue after a whole day's walking, the Friars sat down by the roadside hungry, with nothing to eat and far from any human habitation. Providence did not fail them: a handsome young man suddenly appeared, placed a white loaf alongside them, and vanished. The Friars ate, and the virtue of this heavenly bread restored their bodily strength, while the thought of the loving care of Providence for its poor volunteers inundated their souls with indescribable joy. The next day they halted at Orta, at the junction of the Tiber and the Nera, in a pretty valley sheltered by Monte Cimino. After fifteen days they quitted this too enchanting spot, recrossed the Tiber, and fixed their abode in a deserted hovel not far from Assisi, on the road from Foligno to Portiuncula, on the borders of a famous torrent called Rivo Torto,* which descends from Monte Subiaco.

The cabin was so narrow and dilapidated that they had hardly room to sit down, and Francis was obliged to write the name of each friar upon the cross-beams, so that they might more easily follow their attraction for prayer. They lived on alms and the produce of

* Winding river.

their labour, and sometimes were reduced to feed on roots. No matter! They were cheerful in the midst of privations from which our delicacy would shrink, and found more sweetness in penitential tears than worldlings find in their false pleasures and delights. Having yet no breviary wherewith to recite the Office, they assembled round a wooden cross which served them for a book; and there, upon a stone seat, they silently meditated upon the Passion of the God-Man.

Three principal occurrences belong to those heroic times of Rivo Torto. Let us leave the Seraphic Doctor first to relate them: "One Saturday the holy founder had gone to Assisi, to preach the next day in the cathedral, as he had done on the previous Sundays, and passed the night in the Canons' garden. Now, towards midnight, a fiery chariot, upon which was a globe as resplendent as the sun, penetrated into the Friars' retreat at Rivo Torto, and went round it three times. Their astonishment and admiration could not be depicted, particularly when they were internally as well as externally enlightened, and each one could read the consciences of his companions like an open book. They could not be deceived: this luminous chariot, this fiery globe, this Elias of the New Testament, was their blessed Father."

The second fact is not less remarkable. It was toward the close of September 1209. Otho IV. was going to Rome to be anointed and crowned by Pope Innocent III. Francis neither went out nor turned aside to see the German Cæsar pass by with pride and pomp; but charged one of his Friars to take him this message, "Know, prince, that thy glory will not last long!" The prince was displeased with the

prophecy; but, nevertheless, it was fulfilled.* We know the sad end of this emperor: he was excommunicated the year following by the same Sovereign Pontiff, lost his crown, and perished miserably eight years after (1218).

The third event was the arrival of a new disciple named Sylvester. He was the first priest of the Order, and was called in a very extraordinary way. He had sold some stones to S. Francis at the time of the restoration of S. Damien's; but, although he was paid for them, grumbled at not getting more, and for that purpose availed of the occasion when our saint was superintending the distribution of Bernard of Quintavalle's goods (April 1209). Francis, who had a horror of lawsuits and contentions, immediately takes a sackful of gold, and gives a handful of it to the avaricious priest, saying, "Here is the payment which you claim and which I don't owe you." Sylvester went away, humiliated but satisfied.

Reflecting on his scandalous conduct that evening, he was touched with remorse, and promised God to repair the injustice. A mysterious dream completely dispelled the prejudices he cherished in his heart against the poor of Jesus Christ. During the night he saw, first, a horrible dragon passing over Assisi, and going to exterminate the inhabitants; then the radiant figure of Francis, and in the saint's mouth a golden cross, whose summit reached the firmament and whose arms extended from pole to pole; and finally, the brilliancy of this cross putting the dragon to flight. Three times he had the same vision. At last, understanding that it was a warning from heaven, he ran and threw himself at the feet of Francis, related

* Thomas of Celano.

his vision, and not only conjured him to pardon his fault, but also to admit him into his company. The holy founder, affectionately embracing him, replied, "My son, I willingly grant thee both favours." Nevertheless — we do not know for what motive— it was only in the month of September. of the same year, after the verbal approval of Innocent III., that he put on the garb of penitence. The Seraphic Doctor, from whom we take this account, adds that from that hour Sylvester's life—a life of prayer, penitence, and poverty—testified to the truth of the vision we have related. Sylvester is the twelth companion of the Blessed Patriarch, and his arrival puts the finishing touch to the resemblance between the new institute and the Apostolic College.*

Thus the Almighty environed the humble cabin of Rivo Torto with the triple aureola of sanctity, miracles, and prophecies.

After a month's sojourn at Rivo Torto, Francis assembled his twelve companions † and said, "Brethren, the Lord has deigned to make known to me that He will multiply our little family. We want a larger dwelling, a church for the canonical office, and a cemetery for the dead. Let us go, then, to the Bishop of Assisi and beg him to procure an asylum for our infant Order." The bishop could not meet the saint's wishes. The latter was more fortunate with the Benedictines of Monte Subiaco, who most gracefully handed over to him the little chapel of S. Mary of Angels, with the adjoining house and a small plot of land, on condition that this convent would always be regarded as the cradle and mother-

* S. Bonaventure, chap. iii.; Bernard of Besse, &c.
† S. Bonaventure, chap. iv.

house of the Order of Friars Minors. Francis willingly accepted the present and condition;* it was all he wanted. His gratitude has been perpetuated, and now, as six hundred years ago, his children love to repeat that it is to the disciples of S. Benedict they are indebted for their first house and their first oratory.

Francis immediately came with his Friars to occupy Portiuncula, there to continue the penitential life he had inaugurated the previous year. Ah! with what sweet emotions his heart throbbed when, in the name of the Queen of heaven, he took possession of this little corner of thrice-blessed earth! What burning accents of gratitude then ascended to the throne of the Immaculate Virgin from this little chapel! Would that it were given to us to hear and gather from their lips those first sighs of love! The very choice of the place recalled so many memories, awakened such hopes in the heart of the servant of God! It was there Pica first consecrated him to Mary! It was there he first fought in the rude combats of penitence, and his work was born of a smile from Mary! It was from thence he went to prostrate himself on his knees before the Vicar of Jesus Christ! Did not such favours loudly proclaim that Mary meant to remain the patroness of his Order after being its mother? Was it not under her shelter and under her azure mantle that this very Order was to increase and prosper?

Such were the thoughts that were running through his mind. To better ensure the protection of her who

* He ordered that every year the religious of Portiuncula should carry a little basket of fish, caught in the Chiascio, to the abbot of Monte Subiaco, as a rent charge, or rather as a testimony of gratitude.

is the Advocate of mankind, he confided to her from the very first his rejoicing in the past, his solicitude for the future; and, transferring to the religious life one of the most sacred usages of mediæval chivalry, kept his night-watch of honour, passing the first night in prayer at the feet of his Sovereign, as if he had been an armed knight of Jesus and Mary, which he actually was. The august Virgin appeared to him, surrounded by a multitude of heavenly spirits, and, smiling lovingly upon him, showed him the glorious destinies of that humble sanctuary. At daybreak he rose and cried like the patriarch Jacob, "Truly this is a holy place, which should be inhabited by angels rather than men! I shall not quit it, as long as I can. It will be for me and mine an eternal monument of the Divine goodness!"

The blessing of Heaven rested upon that house. As soon as the holy founder was installed there, numerous disciples flocked round him. Among them are several who stand out from the group, and whose memory has remained more vividly impressed upon the popular mind. Such are Friars Leo, Ruffino, Masseo and Ginepro or Juniper—Juniper celebrated for his thorough evangelical simplicity and love of humiliations, of whom Francis, alluding to his name, said, "Would to God that we had a wood of such junipers!"—Masseo of Marignano, in whom were harmoniously united concise diction, incomparable sweetness in discoursing of God, and, moreover, such perfect obedience that he willingly fulfilled the meanest conventual duties; Ruffino, scion of a noble family of Assisi, and a relation of S. Clare, a seraphic flower whose perfume gladdened the Church of God, an elect soul of whom the Patriarch said, "The Lord

has revealed to me that it is one of the purest and most faithful souls in the world; and I would unhesitatingly give him the title of saint even in this life, since he is already canonised on high;" in fine, Leo, the candid, the angelic Brother Leo, he whom, on account of his frankness, S. Francis called the little sheep of the good God, *la pecorella di Dio*, a pure, simple soul, peaceful and pellucid like one of those unknown lakes lost to view among the lofty mountains, and in which are silently mirrored all the splendours of heaven. Is it not written in the Gospel, "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God"?

Friar Leo holds a place apart in the heart of his blessed Father and the history of the Friars Minors. Compatriot, secretary, and confessor of the saint, inseparable companion and privileged friend to whom the Patriarch opened out all the treasures of his heart, he was, if we may be allowed the expression, the S. John of the Seraphic College, and, after having been so closely united to our saint during the days of his earthly pilgrimage, merited to be united to him after death. They deposited his remains at the foot of the altar dedicated to S. Francis of Assisi.

There was ecstatic converse between master and disciple, which our old chronicler, Bernard of Besse, seems to have gathered from their lips to record it with inimitable grace, and which we bequeath as a treasure to the piety of future generations.

They were both going from Perugia to Our Lady of Angels on a cold winter's day. Friar Leo was walking a few steps in advance, absorbed in his meditation. S. Francis called him, "Brother Leo," said he, "God grant the Friars Minors may give a great example of sanctity to the whole world! Nevertheless, dear sheep

of the good God, know that that is not perfect joy." A little farther on he resumed, "O Brother Leo, were the Friars Minors to restore sight to the blind, cast out devils, cause the dumb to speak and the dead to arise, know that that is not perfect joy." Farther on again, "O Brother Leo, if the Friars Minors knew all the languages and all the sciences, if they had the gift of prophecies and discernment of hearts, know that that is not perfect joy." And a little farther, "Dear sheep of the good God, if the Friars Minors spoke the language of the angels, if they knew the course of the stars, the virtues of plants, the secrets of the earth, and the nature of birds, fishes, men, animals, trees, stones, and water, know that that is not perfect joy." Then a few steps farther on he again resumed, "O Brother Leo, even if the Friars Minors succeeded by their preaching in converting all the infidels to the Christian faith, know that even that is not perfect joy." He continued to speak in this strain for two miles. At last his astonished companion asked, "Father, I pray you, in the name of God, tell me then in what perfect joy consists?" The saint replied, "When we will reach S. Mary of Angels wet, benumbed with cold, dying with hunger, and when we shall knock at the door, suppose the porter should say to us, 'You are two idle vagrants! You are pilferers of alms; get out of this!' If he should leave us at the door the whole night in the snow and cold, and we should bear that patiently, unmurmuring and undisturbed, thinking the porter treats us as we deserve, and that all that happens to us by God's permission, believe me, Brother Leo, that is perfect joy! And if, urged by night, cold, and hunger, we begged the Friar, with clasped hands, and for the love of God, to let us into the convent, and that,

rushing out angrily with a big knotted stick in his hands, he flings us out into the snow and sends us away covered with wounds; if we bore all this bad treatment peacefully, thinking we ought to share in the sufferings of our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ, believe me, Brother Leo, that indeed is perfect joy! For of all the spiritual gifts the Holy Ghost showers down upon souls, the most excellent is the gift of self-conquest, and willingly suffering for the love of God." *

Another day, in the early times of the Order, S. Francis was again travelling with Brother Leo. Having no book to recite the canonical office, he said to his companion, "Dear sheep of the good God, it is the hour for Matins, and we have no breviary to recite it. And yet we must chant the praises of God. Here is what we will do. I will say, 'O Brother Francis, thou hast committed such sins when thou wert in the world, that thou meritest to be precipitated to the bottom of hell.' And thou, Brother Leo, wilt answer, 'It is true that thou deservest to be precipitated to the bottom of hell.'" And Friar Leo, with the simplicity of a dove, says, "Willingly, Father;" but, in place of replying as Francis wished, said on the contrary, "God will do so much good through you, that you will go to Paradise." The saint took him up, "You mustn't say that, Brother Leo, but when I'll say, 'O Brother Francis, thou hast so multiplied thy iniquities against the Lord that thou only meritest His maledictions,' thou wilt answer, 'It is true thou deservest to be of the number of the damned.'" But Brother Leo says, "O Brother Francis, God will forgive you, and you will be blessed among all the

* Bernard of Besse, *Fioretti*, chap. viii.

elect." Then the saint gently rebukes him, "Why have you the hardihood to transgress the precept of obedience, and so often reply otherwise than I have ordered you?" "Dearest Father," replies Leo, "God is my witness. I wished to repeat the words you prescribed, but He himself made me speak as it pleased Him and against my will." "This time at least," resumed Francis, "reply as I shall teach thee. I shall say 'O Brother Francis, miserable little man, darest thou, after so many crimes, still hope that God will forgive thee?' And thou, dear little sheep, wilt answer, 'No, thou hast no right to His mercy.'" These last words were interrupted by sobs; and, striking his breast, his eyes bathed in tears, he waited until his companion should repeat the same words. But Friar Leo replied, "God will shower down signal graces upon you; you will be exalted and glorified eternally, for whosoever humbleth himself will be exalted. I cannot say otherwise; it is God who speaks by my mouth." It was in this contest of humility they finished their journey.* What conversations, and what souls! Where, we ask our readers, find a more delightful page, a scene more charming, and teachings more profound?

CHAPTER VI.

Trial of the Apostolate—The Noviciate at St. Mary of Angels.

(*1211–1212.*)

In the beginning of the year 1211 Francis, not less zealous for the conversion of sinners than for the

* Bernard of Besse, *Fioretti*, chap. ix.

development of his Order, resolved to send his disciples out upon a conquest of souls. He therefore gathered them round him one evening to try their oratorical talents, and commanded each of them in turn to preach upon several subjects which he designated. They discoursed with such doctrinal accuracy and elevation of thought, that he had no doubt the Holy Ghost had spoken by their mouths. A miracle also occurred to confirm him in this belief. Hardly had he ended speaking when the King of heaven, appearing in their midst in the semblance of a handsome young man, blessed them all one after the other with ineffable graciousness.* They were then rapt in a long ecstasy, on emerging from which the saintly founder addressed to them the following exhortation:—"My brothers and my dear children, return thanks to God the Father and to Jesus Christ His only Son, for having thus deigned to pour out His heavenly treasures upon the simplest men; for, know, it is He who gives speech to the mute and eloquence to the tongues of the ignorant. He has chosen us, mean and contemptible preachers, to proclaim penance and salvation to the world, so that no flesh should glory in His sight. It is His will that we should go everywhere to give testimony of Him by word and works; that we should bring back the stray sheep to the divine fold and carry His name and His faith to the nations and even to the kings of the earth. Go, then, full of courage and self-devotion, ever ready to let yourselves be borne, like beneficent clouds, whithersoever the Spirit of God shall impel you, according to obedience, to pour out the rain of the divine word upon the parched and arid soil of hardened hearts."

* Bernard of Besse.

The next day he divided Italy among them, and set out himself with Friar Sylvester for the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, stopping a few days at Perugia, where God rewarded his zeal by the conversion of a great number of souls, and still more by the miraculous vocation of a young nobleman of that city. The latter was taking a walk in the vicinity of the city, wholly absorbed with the desire of responding to the summons of grace and consecrating himself to God, when the Divine Master appeared to him and said, "Man of desires, if thou wilt enjoy what thou wishest and save thy soul, enter into religion and follow Me." "Into what Order, Lord, must I enter?" "Into the new Order of Francis of Assisi." "And when I shall have entered it, what shall I do to be more agreeable in Your eyes?" "This: lead therein the common life, make no private friendships, do not concern yourself with the faults of others, and form no judgments to their disadvantage." The young nobleman ran and threw himself at the feet of Francis, who gave him the habit of his Order and the name of Friar Humble, on account of the profound humility he discerned in his heart.

At Cortona, where the two missionaries afterwards repaired, the servant of God received several novices, among others the famous Brother Elias, and built a convent for them at Celle, under the walls of that city. When Lent came round he confided the government of the new foundation to Brother Sylvester, took his departure at daybreak on Ash Wednesday with two small loaves as his entire provisions, went down to Borghetto, and had himself taken across to an island in the lake of Perugia,* cautioning the boatman

* The ancient Lacus Thrasimenus, on the shores of which Hannibal achieved his celebrated victory over the consul Flaminius, 217 B.C.

not to tell any one of his retreat, nor return for him until Wednesday in Holy Week. Alone in this uninhabited place he found his way to a thicket, where interlaced brambles and branches of trees forming an arbour served him for a cell, and near which Providence had, as it were, expressly placed a limpid fountain which supplied him with water.* It was here he passed the whole Lent, after the example of the Divine Master, holding converse only with God, the angels, and saints, and observing a rigorous fast, since he ate only half of one of his two loaves. On Wednesday in Holy Week the boatman came to fetch him. A storm having arisen during the passage, Francis stilled it by the sign of the Cross, as Jesus had formerly stilled that on the lake of Genesareth. What brought him back to the convent of Celle was the desire to pass the solemn days of Holy Week among his brethren, and receive Holy Communion of which he had been deprived for forty-two days. He was the first on Holy Thursday to receive the Bread of Angels with the fervour of a seraph, and all his disciples after him. †

Zeal gives no rest to those it possesses. After the Easter solemnities, Francis directed his steps towards Arezzo in company with Brother Sylvester. On entering this town he found it divided into two factions ready to come to blows, and saw an army of demons who were flying from rank to rank inciting the citizens to massacre each other. He immediately turns to his companion, and commands him to go to the gate of the city

* The water of this fountain afterwards cured a crowd of sick people. The Friars Minors later built a little convent in this island, around which were soon grouped pretty fishermen's dwellings.

† Bernard of Besse; Rodolph of Tossignano.

to drive out the demons. Sylvester obeys and cries out with all his might, "All unclean spirits that are here, depart; I order you in the name of the Omnipotent God and His servant Francis!" At that very moment the angels of darkness take flight, animosities are quelled, and both factions gather round Francis. The zealous apostle speaks to them of peace and love with an eloquence that causes the arms to fall from the hands of the combatants; and, in the name of the Gospel, reconciles passions too often irreconcilable.

From Arezzo the man of God repaired to Florence. That great city, then so renowned for its commerce, and which, a century later, was to acquire such splendour under the Medici, did not display less eagerness than its neighbours to hear the saint. Francis's sojourn was of rather short duration, but it was signalised by several events that deserve to be related. The inhabitants made a gift to the holy founder of the little convent of S. Gall at the city gates; and Providence was pleased to immediately inspire numerous vocations, of which the most celebrated was, without contradiction, that of John Parent.

He was a learned jurisconsult, first magistrate of Citta-Castellana, a man of such merit that they had decreed him the title of Roman citizen. One evening, as he was walking in the neighbourhood of Citta-Castellana, he saw a herdsman trying to make a drove of pigs go into their sty, and, very angry as he could not succeed, exclaim, urging them with the end of his stick, "Come, pigs, get into your sty as judges go into hell!" and the animals immediately obeyed. The swineherd's insolent apostrophe, doubtless suggested to him by the remembrance of former dealings with the law, was the means Providence

employed to touch the learned magistrate's heart. He returned quite pensive, meditating on the responsibility of public duties and the dangers of the world, and soon after divested himself of his charge and retired to Florence. God, who wished him all His, brought about an interview with S. Francis, whom he admired and loved, and whose penitential life he quickly resolved to imitate. His only son received the same vocation. Both, having therefore expended their property on pious works, joyfully assumed the habit of the Friars Minors. Thus the saint's prophecy was beginning to be accomplished: "In a short time many nobles and learned men will come to join us, to preach before kings and peoples."

While S. Francis was at the little convent of S. Gall, three inhabitants of the city came to pay him a visit, and brought their sons with them to get his blessing. Our saint, without uttering a word, plucked five figs in the garden, gave one to each of the two first children, and the other three to the last, saying, as he embraced him, "Thou, my angel, will one day be one of my sons." The prediction was fulfilled a few years after. When the child became a young man he entered the Order of Friars Minors, and received the name of Brother Angelo, which he justified by an angelic life.

After numerous excursions through Tuscany, our holy missionary came back to S. Mary of Angels, escorted by his new disciples. He longed to revisit his dear Portiuncula and his first companions, and was desirous of trying the postulants' vocation, for he feared that fervour would diminish with increasing numbers.

At that time the convent of Our Lady of Angels

was the only noviciate of the Order. The saintly founder, persuaded that the beginning of a work decides its future and stamps its physiognomy, reserved to himself the power of admitting postulants, and undertook to form them to the virtues of the religious life. He was more severe in the admission of novices according as vocations multiplied, fearing that tares would get mixed up with the good grain. The world little suspects what a noviciate is; and, truly, one should have passed through it to realise the joys and trials therein encountered. For that reason we think it will please our readers if we initiate them into the mysteries of those years of probation, and let them know what a noviciate of the Friars Minors was, according to S. Francis's idea.

To his thinking, a noviciate was a kind of sanctuary with two doors, one opening upon heaven to speak of men to God, the other upon the earth to speak of God to men. To make each novice a loyal knight of Christ, a devoted servant to his brethren, a lover of evangelical poverty—such was the aim he proposed to himself and had the happiness to attain. Hence, the extreme care he took in studying and directing the postulants' vocation.

The simplest duties afforded him an opportunity of testing their virtue. In this connection the chroniclers relate several incidents, the quaint originality of which will perhaps make the *beaux esprits* of the age smile, but which contain, none the less, profound teaching. Thus, one day two postulants having simultaneously presented themselves at Our Lady of Angels, Francis told them to go into the garden and plant some cabbages head downwards. One of them, a good, simple man, promptly obeyed; the other replied with

an air of self-sufficiency, "Father, that is not the way they do it in my country!" The holy Patriarch accepted the first and sent away the second. The chroniclers add that, in reward of the obedience of the first, the cabbages assumed their natural position of their own accord and became very large.

But the grand trial, the touchstone of solid vocations, was the curing of those poor lepers for whom, as we have seen, he had such a sympathetic devotion. He placed that work of mercy above all others, and never failed to warn the postulants of what they would have to devote themselves to. He dismissed those who could not make up their minds to it; but affectionately embraced those who willingly submitted, received them as his own, and said with a charming smile, "Brethren, let us care for and cherish the lepers; they are Christian brothers by excellence." One of his disciples, Brother James the Simple, of the neighbourhood of Perugia, surpassed them all by his zeal in this office of charity; they called him "the steward and physician of the lazar-house." Francis had specially recommended to him a poor leper whose whole body was one wound. Brother James took such care of him that the sick man gradually recovered his strength. Thinking the open air would help to cure him, he brought him one day to the convent of Portiuncula. It appeared a rash and indiscreet action to our saint, who could not refrain telling Brother James, "It is not right for you to take the Christian brothers out for an airing like this. I wish you to tend them in the hospital, but I would not like you to bring them out: many persons cannot bear the sight of them." The sick man, hearing his benefactor thus reprimanded, was deeply pained. Francis remarked it, threw himself at his feet,

and asked his pardon. As a penance he wanted to eat out of the same porringer with the leper at the convent door; then, having embraced him, sent him away contented.

Another time the brethren came to tell him that one of the lepers they were tending in the neighbouring hospital, was heaping blows and insults upon them, and went so far as to blaspheme Jesus Christ and His holy Mother. They had willingly accepted the blows and insults, but they could not endure the blasphemies; and, besides, were afraid their presence was an act of complicity. Francis, after hearing them, went to find the leper; and, courteously advancing, greeted him and said, "God give thee peace, my son!" "Peace!" replied the sick man, "and what peace can I have, since God has deprived me of it, and my whole body is one infectious wound?" The saint resumed, "Have patience, brother! Corporal pains are only sent us from on high for the salvation of our souls, and when we bear them patiently they are changed into diamonds of great price which God adds to our crown in heaven." "And how can I patiently endure it?" replied the leper rudely; "they don't give me a moment's rest, and your brethren only aggravate my pains." Francis, knowing by revelation that this unhappy man was possessed of an evil spirit, withdraws for a moment, prays devoutly for him, and returning, says, "My poor brother, since you are not satisfied with others, I will serve you myself." "Willingly," replied the sick man, "but what can you do for me more than they have done?" "Whatever you wish." "Very well! I wish you would wash my whole body; for it exhales such a sickening odour I can no longer bear it." Without further delay the

saint gets hot water scented with odoriferous herbs, then undresses the leper, and washes his wounds. Now, wherever his blessed hand passed the bloody scales immediately fell off, the skin became new, fresh, and ruddy; and, what is an incomparably greater prodigy, the leprosy of the soul was cured along with that of the body. Tears rained from the eyes of the new penitent, as water pours out of an over-full vessel; and words of repentance rushed from his heart to his lips, and from his lips to God! He humbly struck his breast, and cried, sobbing, "Woe to me, who have deserved hell for having insulted the Friars and blasphemed God!" His conversion was complete; he sent for a priest, and the forgiveness of Heaven descended upon that soul, as ardent to repair its crimes as it had been to commit them. Francis, after thanking the Father of Mercies for so great a prodigy, quitted the hospital; his humility dreaded the encomiums such an event would not fail to elicit, and feared to rob God of the honour and glory that belonged to Him alone.

Fifteen days after, it pleased the Sovereign Arbiter of life to withdraw our leper from the miseries of this world. The man died peacefully, fortified with the sacraments of the Church. As soon as he laid aside his earthly tenement, he appeared in the form of a globe of fire to our holy thaumaturgist then at prayer in a wood adjoining the convent. "Father," said he, "do you recognise me?" "Who art thou?" asked Francis. "I am the leper whom the most merciful Saviour has cured on account of your merits. Now I am going to eternal life, and I return thanks to God and you. Be blessed in your soul and in your body, in your words and in your works; for a multitude of

souls will owe their salvation to you. Know that not a day passes that the angels and saints do not thank God for the living fruits you and your Order will gather all over the world. Rejoice, then; extol the goodness of God, and remain with His benediction." At these words he fled towards the eternal mountains, leaving Francis's heart inundated with consolation.* Such were the acts by which the saint encouraged his novices to walk in the way of self-devotion, and by what miracles God was pleased to reward His servant's zeal!

The holy founder detested idleness, which he called the mother of every vice; and, although he was of a very gentle character, was pitiless with idlers. We have a proof of it in the *Legend of the Three Companions.* Among the novices there was one who ate, drank well, and slept soundly, but prayed little and worked still less. Francis, who was a very keen observer, sent for him, and said, "Get out of this, Brother Fly! You have long enough lived like the hornets, who make no honey and devour that of the bees!" And, without looking for any other crime in him, he hunted him out of the company of the Friars Minors.

If, however, he strongly recommended labour—an honourable labour, useful to one's neighbour and without pecuniary reward—he held in still higher esteem fraternal charity, that divine cement without which every house falls to ruin. "I wish," said he to his disciples; "I wish that each of our convents should breathe the most cordial union, and the tenderest fraternal charity reign among us. Blessed, then, be the religious who loves the whole brethren and would never do or say in their absence anything he would not

* Bernard of Besse.

do or say in their presence! But if, unfortunately, any brother is convicted of having sown slander, discord, or hatred, you will inflict exemplary chastisement upon him, which he will have only too well deserved; for he will have used his tongue as a sword to rend the entrails of his neighbour." A short time after he had uttered these menaces, they brought him a religious who had been wanting in fraternal charity. S. Francis, knowing by experience that the lightest faults may have the most deplorable consequences if left unpunished, condemned the culprit to be divested of his habit.* It was one of the gravest disciplinary punishments, for which we can find no better comparison than that of degradation to the soldier.

After these trials, the saintly founder strove to develop in the hearts of his novices the virtues that were dearest to him and which he regarded as fundamental. Nothing so interesting as the conferences, or rather conversations, he gave every evening to the assembled novices and professed brothers, and which form a veritable treatise on the spiritual life. We shall give a few extracts from them, in order that our readers may appreciate their value.

Francis strove to inspire his brethren with the spirit of faith, often reminding them that all that is not God is nothing, and that all that is not for eternity is only falsehood or vanity. He insisted perhaps still more, and rightly, upon humility. "It is by humility," said he, "we recognise the true servant of God; now a man is humble when he is not vain of the good the Lord works by him, when he has a low opinion of himself, when, in a word, he assumes the lowest rank in the scale of beings. Therefore, practise humility. Do

* S. Bonaventure, c. viii., Mariana.

not seek to be called masters or doctors; for the name of Master is only befitting to the Blessed Christ, who alone possesses all the treasures of wisdom and all whose works are perfect. Better is humility without much learning, than much learning without virtue. Happy the religious who makes no more account of the applause of men than of their contempt! For, after all, a man is only what he is in the sight of God, and nothing more. Happy the Friar who is promoted to charges and honours, and only aspires to divest himself of them! Woe, on the contrary, to him who delights in prelatures, and thinks to enjoy them for ever!"

Humility is altogether an interior virtue; modesty is its reflexion on the countenance and in the various motions of the body; and, as men cannot read consciences, it has the power of striking and moving crowds, often more than the thunder of eloquence. The better to impress this truth, the saint said one day to one of his novices, "Brother, let us go out and preach." He goes up to Assisi with his companion, walks through the streets without saying a word, and returns to the convent. "And our preaching, Father?" says the novice to him. "It is done," replied the saint, thereby giving it to be understood that a modest, thoughtful exterior is often an eloquent preaching to the world.

Nevertheless, his favourite virtue, which he was pleased to call the queen of virtues, the foundation of his Order, and the lady of his affections, that which, above all others, he sought to inculcate to his disciples, was evangelical poverty. For it he had accents of fire; and then, to be eloquent, he had only to let his heart speak. Let us listen to the discourse, or rather the

enthusiastic hymn with which this virtue inspired him:—

"Dearest brethren, well-beloved sons, do not be ashamed to beg, because you are thus walking in the footsteps of the Son of God, who for us became poor in this world. It is this most lofty poverty which makes you heirs of the kingdom of heaven. Go, then, with the blessing of God and ask alms; go with more confidence and joy than if you offered a hundred to one, since it is the love of God you offer in asking for it when you say, 'Give for the love of God,' and that in comparison with this love heaven and earth are nothing! Recollect that bread begged from door to door is the bread of angels; for it is the good angels who inspire the faithful with the thought of giving it for the love of God. Thus is accomplished the word of the Prophet-King: 'Man has eaten the bread of angels.'* God has given the Friars Minors to the world in these latter times, in order that the elect may have an opportunity of practising those works of charity which will be the cause of their glorification, when the Sovereign Judge will address to them these words, 'As long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me.'"†

Often, prostrate on the pavement of S. Mary of Angels, he repeated this admirable prayer, "Lord Jesus, show me the ways of Your dearest poverty! Have pity on me and my lady Poverty; for I love her so passionately that I can find no rest away from her. You know it, O my God, since it is You who have put this great love in my heart. She weeps seated in the dust of the road way, and her friends themselves pass her by contemptuously. See, then,

* Ps. lxxvii. † Matt. xxv.

the abasement of this queen, O Lord Jesus, You who descended from heaven to earth to make her Your spouse, and to have of her, in her, and by her perfect children. She was in the humility of Your mother's womb; she was in the crib; and, like a faithful equerry, stood by you fully armed in the grand fight You fought for our redemption. She was the only one not to abandon You in Your passion. Mary, Your mother, stood at the foot of the Cross, but Poverty, ascending it with You, clasped You in its embrace unto the end. It was she who lovingly prepared the rude nails that pierced Your hands and feet; and when You were dying of thirst, like an attentive spouse, presented You with gall. You expired in her warm embraces; dead, she did not leave You, O Lord Jesus, and would not allow Your body to repose anywhere but in a borrowed sepulchre. It was she, in fine, who breathed warm life into You in the depth of the tomb and made You rise therefrom in glory. So, You have crowned her in heaven and given her the seal of the heavenly kingdom to sign therewith Your elect. Oh! who would not love the lady Poverty above all others? Oh, most poor Jesus, the grace I ask of You is to grant me the treasure of the most lofty poverty; let the distinctive character of our Order and my life be never to possess anything of our own under the sun, for the glory of Your name, and to have no other patrimony than mendicity."* And, as this austere despoilment is revolting to nature, he added, "Be on your guard against the weaknesses, surprises, and betrayals of the flesh; it is our deadliest enemy. At the remembrance of past evils, it complains; at the sole thought of evils to come, it shudders. Let us, then, wage war on our

* Works of S. Francis of Assisi.

sensual appetites, a war without truce and without mercy! for, for a passing pleasure, they do not care if they rob us of paradise and precipitate us into hell." Could our saint more clearly unfold these two fundamental truths: that combat is the very basis of the Christian life, and that sanctity is nothing else than the victory of reason and grace over corrupt nature?

However reticent he was with regard to supernatural favours of which he was the recipient, he had no scruple about revealing them to his brethren, as often as charity or the good of souls required. One instance, which we take from Bernard of Besse, will prove it. "One night our blessed Father, full of the Spirit of God, who had just visited him, left his cell, awoke his disciples and said, 'Ah, dear brethren, what an honour to us to have been called to serve the great King of heaven! It is the greatest glory the human mind can conceive. But who will tell us by what signs we shall recognise whether we are, or are not, the faithful servants and friends of God? For my part, I frankly confess I have conjured the merciful Saviour with tears to enlighten me on this subject, protesting that I wished to be all His, without reserve and without return. He heard my prayer, and, suddenly appearing, put this question to me with sublime familiarity, "Francis, what would you give to obtain this knowledge?" "Lord, I offer You both my eyes and my life; I have nothing better, and You know that this long time I have given You all the rest." "Well, thy desires are heard. Think holily, speak holily, act holily, and hold for certain that thou wilt then be My servant and My friend." Brothers, I wished to acquaint you with this oracle from heaven, in order that you might derive profit from it for your spiritual advancement, and also

that you might not hesitate to reprehend me if, unfortunately, I should be wanting in any of these three points.'"

The convent was a family, and Francis in the midst of his brethren was like a father in the midst of his children, same affectionateness, same unrestraint. They took their recreations in common. Conversation was easy, pleasant, and interlarded with *bons mots*. Our saint loved to extol the merit and good qualities of every one, and not depreciate them, as occurs too often. Thus he said pleasantly to the novices, pointing to Brother Angelo, "To be a perfect Friar Minor one should unite the ardent faith of Brother Bernard of Quintavalle, and the angelic purity of Brother Leo, to the exquisite courtesy of Brother Angelo. Politeness is good and laudable," he added, "it gives to manners a pleasing *cachet* of distinction; and when it adorns virtue, endows it with an irresistible attraction that charms worldlings and facilitates their conversion." Brother Giles meanwhile coming in, interrupting, asks, "Father, is there anything in this world so terrible that one could not endure it during the space of a *Pater Noster?*" "Yes," replies the saint, "there is a monster so horrible that, unless by a special grace from God, no one could endure the sight of it for a single minute. That monster is the demon!"

Among demons Francis dreaded much for his novices that of sadness, because sadness insensibly leads to discouragement and discouragement to despair. That is why he recommended to His disciples the innocent joys and recreations that repose the mind, and gently reproved those who were inclined to sadness. "Brother," said he one day to a novice whose sombre and fretted air he remarked, "why that downcast visage? Have

you committed any sin? For that is the only evil that should sadden us. Go and pray; for it is only at the foot of the tabernacle we may weep to obtain forgiveness for our faults, and recover interior joy when once lost. But before me and your brethren always wear a look of holy joy; for it is not befitting, when in the service of God, to look melancholy or scowling."

Such were the conferences at the monastery of Our Lady of Angels, and the life they led there. It may be easily divined, men capable of understanding such lessons and putting them in practice were prepared for any sacrifice, for all kinds of self-devotion.

All did not persevere. Francis, who had received in such a large measure the gifts of prophecy and discernment of hearts, read in the depths of souls the struggles that raged there; and profited by it to strengthen the weak, console the timid, and unmask the false virtues of the hypocrites.

One day when the novices manifested their surprise and sorrow at the departure of one whom they esteemed the most virtuous, "Don't be surprised at his departure!" he said; "that unhappy man is lost, because he was not founded upon humility. Believe me, every building that has not this virtue for its foundation is a ruinous edifice."

Publicly reproving public faults, he predicted the sad end that awaited two religious: one, who passed for a saint and refused to confess otherwise than by signs, so as not to break silence, that he would quit the Order; the other, who had already put off the holy habit and who asked for it again, that he would be hanged if he relapsed into his sins. Both predictions were realised, and Francis wept bitterly over the double calamity he could not prevent.

As he was careful in discerning true from false vocations, so, after the year's probation, he studied to wisely distribute the duties according to each one's aptitude, for the greater glory of God. Those in whom he observed most judgment and maturity of mind, he sent to found new monasteries at the request of the bishops; those who had received from Heaven the gift of eloquence, he devoted to the ministry of preaching; others he allowed to give themselves up to the contemplative life, or the care of the sick. As for himself, an example to all, he seemed to unite all the vocations.

The Most High scattered blessings upon the little convent of Our Lady of Angels; and vocations flocked thither from all sides, drawn by the sweet odour of our saint's virtues.

We have just seen his efforts crowned with success in the direction of the noviciate: in the following chapter we are going to assist at the beginning of his apostolate in his native place; gathering along with him the first and fairest fruit of his labours, and following the progress of his providential mission. Already, under the shadow of the Cross, he has trained a militia whose object is to combat at once the world, the flesh, and the devil, and already this picked troop has achieved brilliant victories. People are moved, sinners are converted, and a large number of men of every rank, enamoured, like our saint, of the love of God and voluntary poverty, are ranked under his standard. Still, it is only the first halting-place on his reparative mission; Providence destines him to save not only men, but women and the whole world.* For that purpose he is going to affiliate a

* Up to this he had only preached detached sermons.

coadjutor worthy of himself, the illustrious virgin of Assisi, S. Clare, who will be the Mother of the Poor Ladies, as he is the Patriarch of the Friars Minors. And the place selected by Heaven to be the cradle of this second institute is also Portiuncula; there Clare's vocation will reveal itself, in order that it may be manifest to all eyes that Mary is the mother of the two Seraphic Orders, and that it is in the modest sanctuary of Our Lady of Angels must begin the renovation of the thirteenth century.

CHAPTER VII.

S. Clare and the Poor Ladies.

(*1212.*)

S. Clare was born at Assisi. Her parents, Favorino and Ortolana, united the arms of the two most ancient houses of that city, the Scefi and the Fiumi, and counted among their kindred the Blessed Sylvester and Ruffino. The count possessed on the southern declivity of Monte Subiaco the castle of Sasso-Rosso, the imposing ruins of which are still visible. The countess, an eminently pious woman, had, through devotion, undertaken the pilgrimages of the Holy Land, of S. Michael's on Monte Gargano, and St. Peter's at Rome. On her return, God, in His mercy, visited her, and Ortolana, like the mother of Samuel, obtained by virtue of prayer and fasting a child worthy of herself. One day, as she was kneeling before her crucifix, and conjuring the Lord to bless the fruit of her womb, she heard a melodious voice, like that of the angels, saying

to her, "Fear naught, Ortolana, thou wilt happily give birth to a light that will enlighten the whole world." The predestined child was born a few days afterwards, with a smile upon her lips. She received the regenerating water at the same sacred font where Francis had been baptized twelve years before, and her mother desired that they should give her the beautiful name of *Clare*,* symbol and presage of her future greatness. Heaven and earth rejoiced on that day. It was the 16th of July 1194.

Clare was always an angel of innocence and piety. From her youth she gave herself up to various practices of mortification, and wore a hair shirt under her costly clothing. She was very tall, had delicate and majestic features, fresh, ruddy complexion, and a face magnificently framed by her fair tresses. Her parents, delighted at seeing her possessed of such rare attractions, only thought of settling her in the world; but the young girl had a loftier ambition, and, at eighteen, contemplated offering to the King of kings the brilliant flower of her virginity. God came to her aid, sending her to the blessed Patriarch who was to be her guide on earth and her eternal friend in heaven. The saint was preaching in the church of S. George, at Assisi, during the Lent of 1212. They were his first Lenten sermons; and although it is written that no one is a prophet in his own country, the young deacon captivated his fellow-citizens by the charms of his eloquence. Clare, desirous of knowing an apostle of whom such marvels are related, goes one evening with her mother and her sister Agnes to hear one of his instructions. She sees, hears, and admires him, and from that moment selects him for the director of her life. The

* *Clara*, luminous, illustrious.

young girl unfolds her design to a widow worthy of her entire confidence, her kinswoman Bona Guelfuccio; and repairs along with her, in the greatest secrecy, to Our Lady of Angels. The old chroniclers have depicted this first interview in a graceful and graphic narrative. Francis, knowing by revelation that he has before him a treasure of which the world is not worthy, unveils to Clare the value of virginity, the ravishing beauty of the Heavenly Spouse, and the ineffable joys of a union that time cannot annul. Then, to try her, he adds, "My daughter, if you wish me to believe in your vocation, go, lay aside all these jewels and finery; put on sackcloth, and go beg from door to door." Clare unhesitatingly obeys, and comes back at the close of Lent to find the holy Patriarch. She was impatient to give herself entirely to God, and the days that separated her from alliance with her beloved Jesus seemed centuries. Francis, on his side, fearing that such a beautiful, delicate flower would be blighted by the poisonous atmosphere of the world, thought it was time to transplant it into the enclosed garden of the religious life. It is agreed that this great act was accomplished on Palm Sunday (March 19, 1212). The young virgin, dressed in gala attire, repaired to the cathedral of Assisi; but, in place of going up to receive the blessed palm, according to the Italian custom, remained in her place, with modest, downcast eyes. The bishop, perceiving her, descending the sanctuary steps, hands her a palm, emblem of the victory she is about to achieve over the world. The following night, at an hour when all were sound asleep, Clare quits her father's house, adorned like a bride on her marriage day, and accompanied by her faithful friend Bona. The stones and stakes that barricaded the way out of the garden mira-

culously yielded to the touch of her fingers; and the innocent dove, happy at seeing her last bonds broken, took her flight towards the house of God, to offer herself as a holocaust on the altar of divine love. The religious with lighted tapers in their hands, awaited her at Our Lady of Angels. Francis cut off her hair, as a sign that she renounced the world's vanities, clothed her with a coarse ashen-grey habit bound round with a cord, and threw a thick veil over her head. Then she pronounced her vows at the feet of the Immaculate Virgin, and distributed all the valuables she had to the poor. The sacrifice was consummated, the immolation was complete, the servant of God led her to the monastery of S. Paul; and once more it was S. Benedict furnished an asylum to the second Order, as to the first.

There can be no doubt that in all that, Francis, who was only a deacon, acted by divine inspiration and with the authorisation of the Bishop of Assisi.

Trials were not wanting to our saint. Her father and mother ran to St. Paul's, and spared neither entreaties nor threats to wrest her from it; but Clare, showing them her shaven head, and clinging with all her might to the pillars of the altar, finally triumphed over their attacks. Francis, to shelter her from another storm, had her transported to San Angelo di Panso, another convent of the Benedictines.

Clare was the first flower of the virginal garden of the Poor Ladies. Her sister Agnes was the second. She was a young girl of fourteen, pure as a lily, gentle as a lamb. Clare begged the God, whose delight is to be in the midst of the lilies, to cast a glance of mercy upon her young sister, and admit her in turn to the virgin's banquet. Her prayer was heard. A few

days after, Agnes came to rejoin her, and said, "Sister, I wish to serve God along with you." "Dearest sister," replied Clare, clasping her in her arms, "how I thank Heaven for having realised my most ardent desire!" Clare and Agnes!—two sisters, two conquests of S. Francis, two pure victims who ran to immolate themselves upon the altar of the living God more joyfully than worldlings run to their pleasures!

While such a delightful spectacle gladdened the convent of San Angelo, the paternal house was witness of quite a different scene. There, there were cries of sorrow, rage, and despair. Count Favorino was exasperated. Presently he assembles his friends, and communicates his sentiments to them. Twelve of them take up arms, and swear to bring back his daughter, dead or alive. Without respect for the sanctity of the place, they penetrate into the cloister; one of them seizes Agnes by the hair and brutally drags her across the rocks to the base of the mountain; but the child's body suddenly becomes so heavy that her captors, forced to confess their powerlessness, leave her on the borders of a ravine. One of her uncles, Monaldo, raises his sacrilegious hand, and is going to strike her with his sword; but he cannot consummate his crime: his arm stops, motionless and withered. Clare, meanwhile, arrives; she conjures her relations to leave her, at least, the blood-stained remains of Agnes. The cavaliers, agitated and remorseful, finally quit the battlefield, while the two sisters, mutually congratulating themselves upon having been judged worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus, intone the canticle of deliverance. Let us hasten to add that this culpable opposition of the family was soon changed into unbounded admiration. Monaldo was miraculously

cured, and, knowing that he was indebted for his cure to his nieces' prayers, became their most zealous defender. Favorino submitted to the will of God, and shortly after slept the sleep of the just.

The saintly founder, having given the penitential habit to Agnes, establishes the two sisters in the house adjoining the church of S. Damien's, the first of the three churches he had repaired. Thus the prophecy, uttered five years before, when Francis announced that a convent of Poor Ladies would flourish there, was fulfilled. Clare shut herself up in this voluntary prison, and only exchanged it for the splendours of heaven. St. Damien's, then, for half a century became, for the daughters of S. Francis, what Portiuncula was for his sons, a land of benediction, closed to the world but open to heaven. Who can say how many heavenly flowers bloomed there under the eyes of God, what odoriferous prayers and virtues embalmed those narrow cells, what terrestrial angels fled from thence to the eternal hills! Let us content ourselves with recalling the fact, that vocations multiplied from the beginning, and that the holy abbess saw a phalanx of seraphic souls—among whom we are glad to count Ortolana, her widowed mother; Beatrice, her second sister; and that Bona Guelfuccio of whom we have already spoken—flock under her crozier.

The Second Order of Penance, afterwards called the Order of Clarisses, was founded. Francis wrote for his spiritual daughters a rule entirely modelled on that of the Friars Minors, with some special constitutions, gave them the name of Poor Ladies, and obliged Clare to become abbess of S. Damien's. He wished this new family, like his eldest born, should rest upon the immovable rock of that absolute poverty

he loved so much. Of the exhortations he unceasingly addressed to them on this subject, we have only one letter, as brief as expressive; we insert it here as a pearl of great value. "I, Francis, the least of your brethren, wish to follow the life and poverty of our Most High Lord Jesus and His most holy Mother, and to persevere therein to the end. I also beg you all, whom I consider as my ladies, and earnestly conjure you to always conform to this life and to this glorious poverty. Beware of any departure whatsoever from it, and of hearkening to contrary maxims and counsels thereon."

The seraphic virgin was worthy of hearing such noble language. "Come," said she graciously to her daughters after the reading of this letter; "come, like doves, and take shelter in the little nest of holy poverty." She was as jealous as the holy Patriarch in the observance of this vow, which confounds human wisdom, of renouncing for ever for her and her Order any property; and we know with what invincible firmness she resisted the pressing solicitations of the Sovereign Pontiffs themselves, rather than contravene it. Gregory IX. one day went so far as to beg her to accept some possessions for her Order, on account of those unhappy times. "If it is your vow that hinders you," he added, "we release you from it." "Holy Father," she replied, "I would be glad to be released from my sins; but I do not want an absolution that would dispense me from following the evangelical counsels." Finally, by dint of entreaties, she obtained from Innocent IV. the privilege of perpetual poverty, the only one ever solicited at the court of Rome; and the Pope himself wrote a letter we shall here

insert, as a unique monument in the annals of the Church.

"Innocent, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to his well-beloved daughter in Jesus Christ, Clare, and to the other sisters of the monastery of S. Damien's: health and benediction. Since you desire to consecrate yourselves to God, and renounce all temporal things, selling your goods and distributing the price to the poor, to follow in the most complete denudation the Divine Pauper who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, nothing can move you from this resolution; for the Lord who feeds the birds, and has clothed the earth with a mantle of verdure and flowers, will surely feed and clothe you until the day when He himself will be your eternal vesture. As you have asked from Us the privilege of the loftiest poverty, We grant you by these presents never to be constrained by any one to take, have, or retain temporal possessions. May the holy peace of God be with those who will love you in Jesus Christ, you, your Order, and specially the convent of S. Damien's, and in the day of judgment may they obtain the reward of eternal beatitude."

Time has consecrated this privilege by a double miracle. For six centuries the sisters of S. Clare have totally abandoned themselves to the care of Providence, and for six centuries Providence, with maternal solicitude, has attended to the wants of the poor recluses. When they happen to be out of bread, they ring the convent bell to implore the charity of the faithful; and if timely succour fails them, the holy sisterhood bless God and joyfully chant a song of thanksgiving in place of their meal.

The Order of Clarisses has grown up side by side

with that of the Friars Minors, and undergone the same vicissitudes. Reformed, or rather restored, to its primitive fervour by S. Colette in the fifteenth century,* it still offers an asylum to souls hungering for sacrifice and immolation, and counterbalances the iniquities of the world; and, in this double relationship, merits popular respect and Christian gratitude. However, we sadly confess, the world has not always done justice to the self-devotedness of those pure souls. The Middle Ages had greeted with enthusiasm the daughters of S. Clare; they had not words to express their admiration of those voluntary victims of love, because they had faith and the Christian sense of things. But modern times have not always entertained those sentiments of admiration and goodwill for them. The eighteenth century, the century of Voltaire, proscribed them *en masse*, or made them mount the scaffold; their only crime was, that they were nuns! Our century—century of doubt and incredulity—tolerates them, biding its time to persecute. In our days, a portion of the upper classes, the lettered class—if it can be called lettered!—confounds the Clarisses in the hatred it bears to all the religious orders, and arrogantly asks, "What are they doing behind their gratings, and why do they thus bury themselves alive between four walls as in a tomb?"

The answer is easy. They are fulfilling the office of Mary Magdalen at the feet of Jesus. Does not the Gospel say they have chosen the better part, and that Mary's rôle is superior to that of Martha? Every Christian, if he would take the trouble to reflect, would

* The reader, desirous of studying the history of this important reform, may, with much pleasure and profit, consult Mrs. Parson's recently published *Life of S. Colette*, a book that does ample justice to the subject.—TRANS.

see in God Himself the reason of the contemplative orders. Has not the Sovereign Master, in effect, the right to reserve to Himself elect souls who burn before Him like the lamp of the sanctuary? If you interrogate Him as to His works, ask Him rather what those millions of stars the human eye could never count are doing on high; why He has placed the fairest flowers in the desert, where they pour out their perfume and open their brilliant petals far from human gaze; why the seraphim remain motionless near His throne, while the angels, heavenly envoys, are sent by Him to His creatures. Like the stars, the flowers, and the seraphim, the contemplative virgins praise God night and day. Is it not enough? And who are you then, child of man, miserable dust, to dare place your interests and your glory on a par with the glory and interests of God?

Let us beware of falling into the error, that these religious are useless to society. Besides the salutary preaching of a heavenly, penitential life, they render it an invaluable service, the service of prayer. Ah! if we could penetrate the secrets of God and history, we would be filled with astonishment at the prodigious effects of their meditation, even in purely human affairs. Do they want historical proofs in support of this assertion? Let them open the life of S. Clare, and they will see, at almost every page, the magnificent demonstration of this truth. We select two instances out of a thousand.

Twice, at the bidding of the emperor, Frederick II., Assisi was besieged by foreign hordes, the Saracens and Germans, and twice it was saved from invasion and destruction through the intervention of the religious of S. Damien's. "Dear sisters," said S. Clare

to her daughters, "we get our daily bread from this city; it would be unjust not to come to its succour now, as far as we can, in such a great peril." They all immediately cover their heads with ashes, and, with tears, beg from God the deliverance of their native place. Their prayer is heard: the enemies, panic-striken, abandon the siege, and flee in disorder.*

Such is the power of prayer on the lips of religious. And if, the better to fulfil this mediatory office—a sublime office which is an outcome of the Redemption—they live in the profoundest retreat and stainless virginity, should they not be blessed for it? Would there be no reason to dread, that contact with such a corrupt and corrupting world would soil their wings and destroy the value of their fasts and vigils? When, therefore, the Clarisses shut themselves up in the silence and solitude of their cloisters, society is benefited. The people, often more enlightened than the pretentious wiseheads of the world, have instinctively seized this practical side of the question. When public scourges and calamities occur, they know to whom to address themselves; they knock at the door of the spouses of Christ, conjure them to raise their pure hands to heaven and disarm the divine anger by their supplications, and are hopeful. Would to heaven modern governments were guided by the same sentiments of confidence and equity! May they at length recognise where the true friends and saviours of a moribund society are to be found! The more they will study the history of Christian nations, the more

* It is in commemoration of this first prodigy, the flight of the Saracens, that the Christian artists represent S. Clare bearing the Blessed Sacrament. The second prodigy, the routing of Vitalis d' Aversa, originated a popular fête, celebrated every year at Assisi on June 22 (*Life of S. Clare*).

they will see that double truth we would wish to write in letters of gold brilliantly luminous, "It is the cloisters that produce most saints, and it is the saints that sustain the world!"

After this glance at the origin, progress, and utility of the Second Order of Penance, let us return to S. Clare, and not leave her without saying a word on her merits and virtues, which, after all, are the work of the holy Patriarch. Does she not deserve to arrest our gaze for a moment? Daughter of S. Francis, his worthy co-operator in the great work of the reformation of morals, his emulator in sanctity, she occupies a grand place in the history of the thirteenth century, of which she is one of the purest glories.

She inherited S. Francis's tender devotion for the God of the Eucharist, and his pious custom of passing long hours at the foot of the tabernacle. Was she ill (which very frequently happened), she wove corporals of the finest wool for the poor churches, thus testifying her profound veneration for the august sacrament of our altars. On the other hand, she was so humble, that, although abbess, she filled the most menial offices in the convent; so charitable, that she made herself the servant of the servants of God; so modest, that she was only once in her life seen to raise her eyelids (it was to ask the Pope for his blessing), and it was only then they ascertained the colour of her eyes, blue as the heavens; so mortified, that her fasts were almost continual and extremely rigorous. In a word, we discover in her all those interior beauties we shall have continual opportunities of admiring in her blessed Father.

We shall meet the virgin Clare again on two solemn occasions; but, meanwhile, let us here insert a charming

episode which we read in Bernard of Besse,* and which may be entitled, "A Saints' Repast." It is the worthy pendant of the leave-takings of S. Benedict and S. Scholastica:—

"Francis often visited the convent of S. Damiens; his heart was in the cultivation of this nursery of heavenly plants by means of instructions. The abbess, while expressing her profound gratitude for such solicitude, had several times manifested a desire, which seems to us quite natural, of revisiting her dear Portiuncula, passing a day there in his company, and sharing his frugal meal; but always met with a repulse. The religious of Our Lady of Angels, having learned the subject of her request, could not refrain from pleading her cause, and said to their Blessed Father, 'Do you think your severity on this occasion is quite conformable to the spirit of charity so strongly inculcated by the Gospel? Sister Clare is a virgin beloved of God; what she wishes is a simple thing of little importance; and since she attaches such value to it, why disoblige her on this point? You forget that it was at your summons she renounced the vanities of the world, and that it was your hands planted this fair lily in the garden of the Heavenly Spouse. Truly she is your spiritual daughter, and were she to ask of you a favour a hundred times greater, you should not refuse her.' 'You think, then,' he replied, 'that I should accede to her wishes?' 'Yes, Father,' they all cried with one voice; 'Sister Clare deserves that you should afford her this consolation.' 'Well,' answered Francis, 'I shall take your advice; and, in order that our sister's joy may be complete, I wish her to come and partake of this meal at Our Lady of

* Chronicle.

Angels. She has already been a long time shut up at S. Damien's; it will be a great happiness for her to revisit this convent where she took the veil of the spouses of Jesus Christ; it is here we will eat together in the name of the Lord.'

"On the day appointed, the abbess performed her pious pilgrimage,* accompanied by one of her daughters and some Friars Minors, who had come for her to S. Damien's. The holy Patriarch went to meet her, and first led her to that little chapel of Portiuncula, still redolent of the memories of her profession. Then he introduced her into the interior of the monastery. The table was already laid; it was a poor mat placed on the bare ground and covered with a few loaves, according to the saint's custom. Francis blesses it; his brethren modestly take their places alongside him, facing Clare and her companion. Nothing worldly, nothing frivolous here. This fraternal love-feast had hardly begun, when Francis began to speak of God, and in such a touching way that his guests, rapt in ecstasy and, as it were, intoxicated with the delights of paradise, forgot all about corporal nourishment. At that very hour, the inhabitants of Assisi, Bettona, and the environs, beheld Portiuncula all aglow; the church, convent, and woods appear to them wrapt in flames. They run thither in haste, for the purpose of putting out the fire. They pass the enclosure, and make their way into the refectory; but, what is their surprise to find themselves in presence of such a moving scene within! 'What we saw,' they say to themselves, 'was a miraculous fire, symbol of the divine love that fires those souls.' And not daring to utter a single

* Nuns could then go out with the permission of the superiors. It was Boniface VIII. who established the perpetual enclosure.

word, for fear of mingling profane speech with such seraphic converse, they retire silent and moved; but, on returning home, they loudly proclaim the marvels they had witnessed.

"In the evening the illustrious abbess returned to her cloister, to tell her daughters of the spiritual riches she had acquired. The religious had passed the whole day in grief and desolation; they were afraid the holy founder had sent her to govern some other convent, like Agnes, S. Clare's sister. So, what was not their joy when they saw their Mother again! What happiness was theirs when they heard her relate the miraculous scene at Our Lady of Angels, and repeat the delightful conversation of their blessed Father!" Such were the marvels the walls of Our Lady of Angels witnessed in 1221.

For forty-one years Clare governed the Poor Ladies. I do not know if there is in the history of the saints a life more penitent than hers; but, certainly, not a more glorious death. Feeling her end approaching, she dictated her testament, in which she bequeaths seraphic poverty as a heritage to her daughters. As Fra Reinaldo was exhorting her to patience under suffering, "Father," said the holy abbess, "since God made known to me the excellence of His grace by the mouth of our regretted Father, S. Francis, nothing has given me any trouble; no penance seemed severe to me, no sickness painful." She afterwards begged brothers Leo and Angelo of Rieti to read the Passion according to S. John for her; then, having received the holy viaticum, she cried, her brow beaming with joy, "Come, my soul, know thou hast a good viaticum to accompany thee, an excellent guide to show thee the way. Fear naught, be tranquil; for He who is

thy Creator has sanctified thee, and has not ceased to watch over thee with the tender love of a mother for her child. And You, O Lord, be blessed for having created me. Seest thou," she continued, turning towards her beloved sister and relation, "seest thou, my daughter, the King of glory whom I am contemplating?" At that very moment the Lord opened the eyes of one of the religious, and she saw the Queen of heaven, followed by a troop of virgins clothed in white, bending over the dying saint, gently inviting her to the nuptials of the Lamb, and gathering her soul as one gathers a ripe fruit. Thus died the virgin Clare, if that was dying! It was on the night of the 10th of August 1253, twenty-seven years after the death of the Seraphic Father. In 1255, Alexander IV., nephew of Cardinal Ugolino, solemnly enrolled her in the catalogue of saints, and decreed her the glorious titles of "Duchess of the humble," and "Princess of the poor." * "Virgin beloved of God," says S. Bonaventure, "she has exhaled the perfume of a spring flower, and shines like the morning star!" More could not be said in fewer words.

CHAPTER VIII.

Apostolate of Francis—Journey to Rome—The Lateran Council.

(*1212–1215.*)

Francis knew that the divinest of works is the salvation of souls; but, feeling more attraction for

* Bull of canonisation.

the contemplative than the active life, had grave doubts about his apostolic vocation. His anxiety increased after he had regulated the spiritual exercises of the convent of S. Damien's. Not knowing what resolution to come to, he assembled his brethren and said, "Brothers, I have come to ask your opinion upon this question: Which of the two is better for me, to devote myself to prayer, or to go about preaching? It seems that prayer suits me better; for I am a simple man and unskilled in oratory, and have received the gift of prayer, more than that of speech. Prayer purifies our affections, unites us to the Sovereign Good, strengthens our will in virtue; by it we converse with God and the angels, as if we were leading a heavenly life. Preaching, on the contrary, makes spiritual men gadders abroad; it distracts, dissipates, and leads to laxity in discipline. Thus, one is the source of graces, the other the canal that conveys them to peoples. Nevertheless, there is a consideration of a higher order, and which inclines me to the apostolic life; it is the example of the Saviour of men, who joined prayer to preaching. Since He is the model we propose to imitate, it would appear more conformable to God's will that I should sacrifice my tastes and repose to go and labour abroad."

To obtain ampler lights he sent two of his religious to S. Clare and Brother Sylvester, the latter having retired to the heights of Monte Subiaco, to beg them to consult the Lord on this subject. When the two religious, Philip and Masseo, returned, Francis received them as ambassadors from God; he washed their feet, embraced them and gave them to eat. Then, leading them to an adjoining wood he knelt before them, bareheaded and with his arms crossed

upon his breast, said, "Brothers, tell me what my Lord Jesus Christ commands me to do." "Dearest Father," said Masseo, "here is the reply Sylvester and Clare have received from our Lord Jesus Christ; it is exactly the same. It is His will that you should preach, because it is not only for your own salvation He has called you, but also for the salvation of your brethren; and for their sake He will put His words in your mouth." At these words Francis, filled with the Spirit of God, arises, exclaiming, "Let us go in the name of the Lord;" * and, full of holy enthusiasm, he immediately sallies forth with two of his disciples, Masseo of Marignano and Angelo of Rieti, to preach God to every creature.

A prodigy as touching as extraordinary marked the first day of this apostolic journey. The saint was approaching the small town of Bevagna when, raising his eyes, he saw a swarm of birds flitting from tree to tree along the roadside. This sight filled him with admiration, and he said to his two travelling companions, "Wait here for me; I must go and preach to my brothers the birds." At the sound of his voice all the birds flock round him, and Francis addresses them thus, "Dear birds, my little brothers, the Creator has showered benefits upon you, and you ought to bless Him for them at every hour and in every place. It is He who clothed you with your beautiful plumage, and gave you wings with liberty to fly wherever you pleased; it was He who preserved you in Noah's ark, and assigned you the serene regions of the air for your sojourn. He feeds you without your requiring to sow or reap; has given you the water of the rivers and fountains to slake your thirst, the

* Bernard of Besse.

mountains and valleys for your refuge, the trees to build your nests in; and He watches over your little family. Ah! since your Creator loves you so much, take care, my little brothers, and do not be ungrateful; strive, on the contrary, to send up an unceasing tribute of praise to Him."

While he was speaking thus, the birds craned their necks, flapped their wings, and bowed down their heads towards the earth, to show the extreme pleasure they took in listening to him. As to the servant of God, he passed familiarly among them, admiring their number and variety, and caressing them in the folds of his habit. Finally he gave them his blessing, and, at a wave of his hand, they all flew away to the four quarters of the world, making the welkin ring with their harmonious songs. When he rejoined his brethren, full of that beautiful simplicity which is the attribute of pure souls, he accused himself of negligence for not having before preached to his brothers the birds who listened so respectfully to the Word of God.*

This prodigy was only a prelude to more striking miracles, by which the Almighty was to seal the truth of His apostolic mission.

On arriving at Bevagna the saint preached an eloquent discourse on the love of God, and cured a young blind girl by thrice moistening her eyelids with his saliva, and invoking the most Holy Trinity. A great number of sinners were converted, and some of his auditors joined him, to become in turn apostles of penitence and peace. Thinking of directing his steps towards the infidel countries of the East, to carry thither the torch of faith, and also with the hope of gathering the martyr's palm, he made his way to

* Thomas of Celano; S. Bonaventure.

Rome to obtain the Pope's necessary authorisation, preaching in the towns and villages *en route*, and scattering miracles as he went along; and, like the Divine Master, he went along doing good.

At Rome he had an audience of the Sovereign Pontiff. Innocent III. was delighted to hear of the rapid propagation of his Order, as well as of the labours and virtues of his brethren: and willingly accorded him the authorisation to preach to the Mahometans. Twice the Eternal City heard the saint, and twice the good seed fell upon well-prepared ground. Two new disciples joined him, brothers Zachary and William.*

The blessed Patriarch also formed a close and holy friendship with a Roman lady named Giacomina (Jacqueline) di Settisoli, one of the noblest and most opulent families of Mount Palatine. This pious widow and the virgin Clare are the only two women with whom he had continuous relations, even for spiritual direction; and in that, too, he was extremely reserved. We should add that they both showed they were worthy of such a predilection; and their affection for the saint, purer than snow, is the perfect image of those transfigured affections that Martha and Mary Magdalen had for our Lord. The most prejudiced mind can find nothing to reprehend; and as to the true Christian, ah! how he rejoices to encounter in history, amid the deluge of guilty love that corrupts the world, some drops at least of that chaste love man lost with his innocence, which we shall one day recover in heaven, and of whose virginal perfume we may sometimes have a foretaste in this world in the lives of the saints!

Giacomina, like the holy women of the Gospel,

* Friar William is that Englishman who was substituted for John of Capella of sad memory.

generously gave hospitality to the poor of Jesus Christ every time they came to Rome, and provided for all their wants. It was owing to her intervention that the Benedictines of S. Cosmas, beyond the Tiber, ceded to the Friars Minors in 1229 the hospital of S. Blase, now the convent of San Francesco-a-Ripa. "The room the saint occupied is still seen there, the stone that served him for a pillow, and an orange tree planted by his hand, which, surviving the lapse of centuries, is every year crowned with foliage, flowers, and fruits: charming figure of the Order he founded, and which, for six hundred years, flourishes with the perennial youth of divine things."*

After a short sojourn in the Eternal City, Francis regained Portiuncula. He unfolded to his brethren his project of going to the East, left them Peter of Catana as superior in his absence, and set sail for Palestine. But God's hour had not yet struck. Cast upon the shores of Dalmatia by contrary winds, he had to abandon for the moment this distant voyage. A miracle marked his return. He and his companion had embarked, without the captain's knowledge and despite the refusal of the crew, in a vessel going to Ancona. As it was a long and difficult passage, and all the provisions on board were exhausted, he miraculously multiplied the food brought by a messenger from heaven to the two poor servants of Jesus Christ, so that the wondering captain and sailors cast themselves on their knees, thanking him for having saved their lives despite them.

Hardly had the zealous missionary disembarked, when he resumed his journeys through Italy, disseminating the Word of life everywhere, curing bodies and

* A de Ségur. † S. Bonaventure.

souls, and drawing the masses after him. His manner of life and preaching give us the key to the universal enthusiasm he was then beginning to arouse. Nothing studied in his person; the coarse habit he wore, his face furrowed by austerities, everything about him breathed penitence and simplicity. His preaching was a model of popular eloquence; disdaining florid rhetoric and the artifices of human wisdom as unworthy of God's ambassador, and energetically protesting against the bad taste of the epoch, he gloried, like the Apostle of the Gentiles, in knowing only Jesus and Jesus crucified. Nevertheless, he made fitting use of the natural talents with which Heaven had endowed him. His voice, at once clear and vibrating, sweet and sonorous, went straight to the heart; his fervent and lucid language captivated and aroused his auditors, and sometimes wrung from them cries of admiration, sometimes tears of repentance. Add to that the prestige of his name, his sanctity, his miracles, and you will have an idea of the magical effect such an orator must necessarily have produced upon the masses. They looked upon him as much more an angel than a man: God did the rest. So, it is by thousands we must count the souls he rescued from the paths of vice, or who became attached to his person, never more to leave him. To quote only one example out of a thousand, he gained thirty disciples in a single day at Ascoli. In the midst of such an abundant harvest we can do nothing better than select a few ears here and there; but they are golden ears. Of this number is the celebrated poet of that time, Guglielmo Divini, laureat-troubadour of the Emperor Frederick II., who had called him the "King of Verses." He was then living in the March of Fermo, his native place. Having heard that the saint was

preaching at San Severino in the province of Ancona, he resolved to go and hear him, and mingled with the crowd pouring thither from all parts. Now, while Francis was unfolding the grandeurs of the Cross, the poet saw two fiery swords crossed upon the saint's breast, and felt himself at the same time illuminated and transformed by grace. After the sermon he went and prostrated himself at the feet of the man of God, who immediately admitted him among his disciples; and seeing him thus suddenly pass from the agitations of the world to the peace of Jesus Christ, called him Brother Pacificus. The former troubadour became a zealous missionary; and we shall see him later on charged by S. Francis with establishing the Friars Minors in France, and by Blanche of Castille with finishing the education of the Dauphin who was to be S. Louis.

This same brother Pacificus had two other visions not less admirable, which he thought it his duty to tell his brethren for their edification, and which resulted, in the designs of God, by still further increasing their veneration for their holy founder. In the first he saw the saint's brow marked with the sign *Thau*, Biblical figure of the Cross; in the second God said to him, pointing to a throne sparkling with gold and precious stones in the midst of the splendours of heaven, "This throne thou admirest, and which an angel lost by his revolt, is destined for the humble Francis of Assisi." The next day, at recreation hour, Brother Pacificus said familiarly to the holy Patriarch, "Father, what do you think of yourself?" "I think," replied Francis, "that I am the most miserable and last of sinners." "How dare you say or even think it?" replied the Friar. "Yes," cried Francis, "I am well convinced

that if our Lord had accorded the same graces to any other person, he would have better profited by them than I have." And the Friar retired, pondering in his heart that oracle of the Gospel, "Whosoever shall exalt himself, shall be humbled; and he that shall humble himself, shall be exalted." *

Towards the close of October of this same year, 1212, our holy missionary crossed the Apennines at the Col Fiorito, and redescended into the valley of the Tiber. The renown of his successes and his incomparable prodigies had preceded him in his native place, and operated quite a revolution there. This very town of Assisi which, six years before, had hated him, now awaited him as an angel of God, and was preparing a triumphant entry which recalls that of the Messiah at Jerusalem. The clergy and people thronged to greet him, bearing palm branches in their hands and chanting canticles, while the bells made the welkin ring with their most joyous peals. Some touched the hem of his habit, others kissed his hands or feet; all thought it happiness to look at him.

These ovations were renewed more than once during his life, without his trying to avoid them. One day his companion, surprised, almost scandalised that he should receive these honours so compliantly, could not refrain from remarking it. "Brother," replied the saint, "do not be scandalised at my way of acting. I refer all this homage to God, without reserving the least of it to myself; as all the honour paid to a statue is referred to the original. On the other hand, all these people gain thereby, because they honour God in the vilest of His creatures." Such was the holy indifference of Francis. The incidents we are going to relate prove

* Matt. xxiii. 12.

better still to what an excess he pushed self-contempt and the love of humility.

He was then thirty-one. He should have been in the strength and vigour of his age; but, undermined by continual fasts and apostolic labours, he was attacked with intermittent fevers that reduced him to a state of extreme languor. They trembled for his life, and Dom Guido, despite his resistance, had him transported to his episcopal palace, to bestow on him the care his condition needed. The invalid did not remain there long; for, as soon as he had regained a little strength, he bitterly reproached himself for what he called a return to the delights of the world. "No!" he cried, "it is not right people should look upon me as an austere man, while secretly I am treated like a prince." Thereupon he rises and goes to the cathedral, followed by several of his brethren and a multitude of the faithful. He orders the vicar of his convent to put a cord about his neck like a criminal, and drag him half clad to the place of execution. There, shivering with cold and fever, he thus harangues the people, "Brethren, I assure you I do not deserve to be honoured as a spiritual man. I am a carnal, sensual, gluttonous man, whom you ought all to despise."

"Oh! sublime folly, under which Francis sought to conceal the gifts of God for fear they should become a stumblingblock to him!" His compatriots divined his thought, and reconducted him in silence to Our Lady of Angels. However they could not entirely restrain the sentiment of admiration that gushed from all hearts. "He is a saint,*" they murmured half aloud. "Be silent," replied the man of God. "You must not praise the living, nor canonise men before their death." These

* S. Bonaventure, chap. vi.

happy repartees were habitual to him. When he returned to Portiuncula, he explained himself clearly to his disciples. "My dear children," said he, "let us not be intoxicated by the incense of human flattery; for, do you not see it would be to enjoy undeserved praise? Now, there is a point wherein all our power fails; poor sinners that we are, in vain we pray, groan, and mascerate our flesh; we can never promise ourselves that we shall be always faithful to God. Then, far from us be the thought of glorifying ourselves in anything whatsoever, unless to render to the Sovereign Lord the honour that is due to Him; to refer everything to Him and serve Him with religious exactitude.*" It is in the midst of these heroic acts and profound teachings that the year 1212 draws to a close.

In the following January, the holy Patriarch had a relapse of fever. It is impossible to say with what serenity of soul, with what joy, he accepted this new trial, "blessing his little sister suffering," as he called it, and saying that the fever heat was a thousand times preferable to the fire of fleshly temptations. His only trouble was his inability to labour efficaciously at the salvation of souls. But the charity of the servants of God, vast as the world, ingenious as that of the Saviour, knows how to assume every form. Unable to preach, Francis felt inspired to write. From his bed of pain he sent to all the children of the Church two circulars which we inshrine in his history as two pearls of great price. Here is the first:

"To all Christians, clerics, religious, laymen, men and women in the whole world: Oh! how happy and blessed are those who love God and perfectly fulfil the precept of the Gospel, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy

* S. Bonaventure, chap. vi.

God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind; and thy neighbour as thyself!'* Let us love God and adore Him with great purity of mind and heart; for it is what He asks above all things when He says, 'The true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth, and they that adore Him must adore Him in spirit and in truth.'† I salute you in our Lord."

In the second letter, after recalling the mysteries of the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and the Cross, and the duties of the Christian life, he concludes with a striking picture of the death of the wicked who have prospered on earth:—"Woe to those who are not doing penance, and who follow the desires of corrupt nature! They are rushing knowingly to their ruin. Open your eyes, then, O sinners!—the wilfully blind who shut their eyes to the light of the Gospel! Know that you are the laughingstock of Satan, your deadliest enemy! You imagine you can long retain the ephemeral goods of this world; and the hour approaches when you will be stripped of them, the fatal hour of which you know not and think not! Look at the rich man of the world dying. His afflicted wife and children surround his bed; while he, deeply affected, bequeaths them his fortune along with his last remembrances. They send for a priest, who requires the restitution of unjustly acquired wealth. 'Restore? It is impossible!' cries the dying man. 'It would be the ruin of my family!' Meanwhile, the malady increases, the man becomes speechless, and dies in the hatred of God. The demons immediately seize upon his soul to torture it, the worms gnaw his flesh, while his neighbours, cursing him, dispute for the fragments of his fortune. And

* Matt. xxii. † John iv.

thus this wretched man, for allowing himself to be seduced by the vain allurements of the world, will have lost his body and soul for eternity! . . . I, Friar Francis, your very little servant, sincerely disposed to kiss your feet, pray and conjure you through charity, which is God Himself, to receive and put in practice, humbly and lovingly, those words of our Lord Jesus Christ and all others that have come from His mouth. Let all those into whose hands they shall fall, and who shall comprehend their meaning, send them to others, in order that they may profit by them. If they persevere to the end in the good use they should make of them, may they be blessed of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen." *

These two epistles, scattered broadcast and read with avidity, crossed the Alps, and reanimated faith and fervour far and near.

Francis, as we have seen, was of a delicate constitution; austerities, labours, and fevers had quickly exhausted his strength, so much so that for the rest of his life he only dragged on a languishing existence. Nevertheless his soul was always ardent, always devoured with the same zeal. Feeling a little better at the return of spring, he formed the project of penetrating into the interior of the Moslem empire of Morocco; and, confiding the government of his Order to Peter of Catana, set out with Bernard of Quintavalle and some other Friars. This journey was nothing but a continual series of miracles, apostolic successes and foundations, with a thousand different incidents, of which we shall relate the principal.

At Terni, in the Pontifical states, the bishop, after having heard the saint preach, ascended the pulpit and

* Works of S. Francis of Assisi.

said to the people, "Brethren, the Lord has often enlightened His Church by doctors and learned men; to-day he sends you this Francis of Assisi, a poor, illiterate man of contemptible aspect, to edify you by his words and example. The less learned he is, the more strikingly is the power of God, who selects one who is mad in the eyes of the world to confound human wisdom, revealed in him." The compliment would have appeared strange to any one else; Francis was enraptured, went and threw himself on his knees at the prelate's feet, kissed his hand, and said, "Thanks, my lord, for having so wisely distinguished the valuable from the vile, the worthy from the unworthy, the saint from the sinner, properly referring all the glory to God alone, and not to me, who am only a wretched, miserable man." The bishop, still more charmed by his humility than his preaching, tenderly embraced him.

In this same town of Terni, Francis worked several miracles, of which this is the most striking. They brought him a young man who had been crushed by a falling wall; Francis had recourse to prayer, lay upon the corpse as of yore the prophet Eliseus upon the son of the Sunamitess, raised him to life, and restored him to his mother in presence of the wondering crowd.

The sanctity of the glorious Patriarch thenceforward flung such radiance around him, that we see it verified in several public monuments of that epoch. Thus at Pontogibonte, in Tuscany, the magistrates drew up a deed of assignment in his favour, which begins with these words, "We grant to a man named Francis, whom everybody regards as a saint, a house wherein he may establish religious of his Order," &c.

He got a very different reception at Imola. Having

asked the bishop permission to preach to his people, "I preach," drily responded the prelate, "and that's enough." The humble missionary bowed and silently retired, but an hour after presented himself before the bishop, who, surprised at seeing him again, asked him what else did he want. "My lord," replied the saint, "when a father drives his son out through one door, the son must enter by another." The prelate, vanquished by such confidence and humility, said, pressing him to his heart, "Henceforth thou and all thy brethren may preach in my diocese."

If our zealous missionaries abandoned themselves completely to the care of Providence, the latter, in turn, proved by many prodigies with what maternal tenderness it watched over them, as we may judge by the following incident. Night had surprised S. Francis and Brother Leo in Lombardy, between deep marshes and the steep banks of the Po. "Father," cried Brother Leo, terrified, "pray to God to deliver us out of this peril." Francis replied, with the calmness inspired by faith and confidence in God, "God, if it should be pleasing to His goodness, can give us light to dispel the darkness of the night." Hardly had he spoken, than they saw themselves environed with a vivid light which guided them along the pathway, while everywhere else the darkness remained very dense, and which accompanied them to the place where they were to lodge. In gratitude for this miracle, Francis founded a convent of Friars Minors in that place, to which he gave the name of "Convent of the Holy Fire."

We have no precise documents to enable us to follow our holy missionary through such a long excursion; we only know that he evangelised on the way Cairo, Corte-

miglia, Asti, Montcalieri, Turin and Susa in Piedmont. Having crossed the Alps, probably at the neck of Mount Cenis, he passed through the cities of Avignon and Lunel * in France, penetrated by way of Navarre into the kingdom of Spain, and repaired to the court of Alphonso IX., father of queen Blanche of Castille. The king received him cordially, and granted him the authorisation to establish his Order in Spain. Having founded two convents, one at Burgos, capital of Castille, the other at Logroño, Francis prepared to pass into Africa, when a long and painful malady opposed an obstacle to his projects. He recognised the will of God in this disappointment, and submitted without a murmur. As soon as he was convalescent he thought of recrossing the Pyrenees, but first went to kneel in the most celebrated sanctuary of the country, S. James of Compostella in Galicia. He only passed through Guimaraëns in Portugal, where he raised his host's daughter to life, and retraced his way to the Pyrenees by Avila, Madrid, Toledo and Barcelona. It affords us pleasure to here affirm that a crowd of monuments still attest his passage through Catholic Spain, and that this country more than any other has preserved the memory of his virtues and his apostolate.

Francis stopped some time at Perpignan, then at

* The Baron de Lunel came to meet S. Francis, and cordially gave him hospitality. Our saint blessed his host's dwelling, and his blessing bore its fruit. One of the Baron's grandsons, the Blessed Gérard, assumed, at five years of age, the cord and habit of penance at the Franciscan Convent of Lunel, led an angelic life in the ancestral castle, early renounced the grandeurs of the world, undertook the pilgrimage of the Holy Land, and died on his way at Monte Santo near Loretto. His cultus was successively approved by Benedict XIV. for Monte Santo, by Pius VI. for the diocese of Fermo, and by Pius IX. for the diocese of Montpellier. (See the *Proper of the diocese of Montpellier.*)

Montpellier;* but he did not penetrate into Languedoc, doubtless because it was the field destined for S. Dominic, apostle and vanquisher of the Albigensian heresy. Finally, after a thousand fatigues and incredible successes, our saint returned to his dear Portiuncula about the close of the year 1214, or perhaps in the beginning of the year 1215.

Great, then, was the joy at Our Lady of Angels. The disciples congratulated themselves on the return of their Blessed Father, and the saint rejoiced to find the number of his children more than doubled, and the religious virtues honoured among them. A cloud, however, overcast this bright sky. Francis, having remarked alongside the monastery of S. Mary of Angels a sumptuous building Peter of Catana had caused to be erected in his absence, was deeply pained at this infraction of holy poverty. In vain they assured him that this house was only destined for the use of the pilgrims who came from all parts. "Brother," said he, in a severe tone to Peter of Catana, "this convent is the rule and model of the whole Order. I wish that those who come hither, as well as those who inhabit it, should suffer the inconveniences of poverty, in order that they may say elsewhere how poor they live at S. Mary of Angels." And he ordered him to demolish the edifice; so much was he persuaded, with the doctors of the Church, that poverty is a precious stone whose value the world does not appreciate, but whose brilliancy surpasses all the riches of the earth in the eyes of God! He only revoked this order at the pressing

* He announced at Montpellier that they would build a convent of his Order in the hospital where he was lodged. The prophecy was fulfilled six years afterwards.

protestations of his brethren, who represented to him that to suppress this hospice would be a breach of fraternal charity, and the hospitality due to pilgrims.

In the midst of those grave preoccupations, the holy founder did not lose sight of the future of his religious family. It was then passing through a crisis that all good works are condemned to undergo at their inception. The more flourishing and popular it was, the more it was calculated to excite the malevolence of some jealous minds, particularly in Germany; the wind of persecution was already blowing upon it: besides, it needed a final consecration, the definitive and solemn approbation of the Sovereign Pontiffs. For all these reasons Francis repaired to Rome.

Contemporary events were to add to the importance of this step. It was the hour when Pope Innocent III. was opening that fourth Council of Lateran, which was to so worthily crown his glorious pontificate, and powerfully contribute to the extinction of heresies, the reformation of morals, and the recovery of the Holy Land.

On the 11th of November 1215, the basilica of S. John Lateran contained within its walls the most august assembly in the universe. There one saw seated seventy primates and metropolitans, four hundred and twelve bishops, more than eight hundred abbots and priors, as well as ambassadors from Christian emperors and kings: above them shone the venerable figure of Innocent III. That great Pontiff, deeply afflicted at the ravages caused by the Vaudois and Albigenses, at their numberless crimes, and still more at their invincible obstinacy in error; unwilling, moreover, that there should be any possible confusion between the faithful disciples of the Saviour and His hypocritical enemies, solemnly

condemned both sects and their abettors, opposed to them the two providential militias God sent to the succour of His Church, and declared, before all the Fathers of the Council, that he had already approved by word of mouth in 1209, and that he again approved of the Order and Rule of the Friars Minors. He likewise adopted the Order of Friars Preachers; nevertheless, with this express clause, that their founder, S. Dominic, should select one of the old rules and adapt it to his Institute.

The Œcumenical Council only lasted twenty days; but the Pope and Council had done enough by ensuring the moral regeneration of the future. As to S. Francis, strong henceforth in the benediction of heaven, and the high sanction of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, he despatched circulars dated from Rome convoking all his brethren to the first Chapter-General of the Order, which he was to hold on the Feast of Pentecost, the year following at Our Lady of Angels; then he joyfully returned to Umbria, not, however, without having evangelised the chief towns on the Adriatic shore, Ascoli, Camerino, Macerata, Monte Casale, Ancona, and Fabriano.

On his return the Benedictines, to whom he was already indebted for the convent of Our Lady of Angels, offered him a second monastery, known since by the name of the Carceri (the prisons). This hermitage—perched like an eagle's nest on the flanks of Monte Subiaco, about two miles from Assisi, and hidden behind a curtain of green-leaved oaks—with its cells, or rather its grottoes, cut into the heart of the rock or formed by its natural rents, harmonised too well with our saint's tastes for him not to gratefully accept such a donation. He often went up there afterwards. "There he loved

to retire after his apostolic labours, to be more absorbed in God. There, buried in prayer, like a diligent bee he gathered from the flowers of heaven an abundant juice, and transformed it into a delicious honey, which he afterwards distributed in his sermons to souls hungering after God." *

Those austere grottoes are still embalmed with the perfume of his presence and his prayers; and for six centuries pilgrims have continually mounted thither to venerate his oratory, his cell, the stone that served him as a bed, the wells whose waters gushed from the bowels of the rock at his prayer, the venerable oak upon which the birds perched while he harangued them, and lastly, a torrent and ravine that were the object of a miracle and a prophecy worthy of being related.

The torrent, tumbling from cascade to cascade from the summit of the mountain, rolled noisily its foamy murmuring waters to the bottom of the excavations, disturbed the Friars at their Office, frequently inundated the forest lands and destroyed the harvests. Francis made the sign of the Cross, and commanded it to be still: the torrent immediately stopped; thenceforward its waters glided noiselessly and never overflowed the plain.

As to the ravine, it is, at the foot of the hermitage, enveloped in darkness and generally dry. Here is the prophecy our saint made to his disciples, pointing to it, "When the water of the torrent will flow through this ravine, prepare; for it will be a sign that great calamities will befall Italy." †

* Mark of Lisbon.

† The water flowed there in 1859 on the eve of the Piedmontese invasion, and on the eve of other political and social calamities, notably in June 1871, just before Victor Emmanuel's entry into Rome.

CHAPTER IX.

FIRST CHAPTER-GENERAL OF THE ORDER — S. FRANCIS AND S. DOMINIC — CARDINAL UGOLINO — SECOND CHAPTER-GENERAL.

(*1216–1219.*)

ON the 30th of May 1216, the feast of Pentecost, all the Friars Minors were assembled at the feet of Our Lady of Angels, and solemnly opened their first Chapter-General. This general reunion, although somewhat thrown into the shade by the *éclat* of the second, was none the less fruitful in results, and decisive as to the future of the Order. The founder took two important measures upon that occasion: he divided the world among his children, and, moreover, erected into distinct provinces Lombardy, the March of Ancona, Calabria, Tuscany, Terra di Lavoro, and de la Paglia, conferring on the Ministers-provincial the power, until then reserved to himself, of admitting to the noviciate and religious profession. He afterwards busied himself about the evangelical workers who were to go beyond the Italian frontiers, and appointed Bernard of Quintavalle for Spain, John Bonelli for Provence, John of Penna for Germany, each with a large number of Friars. He himself elected to take Paris, the north of France, and the Low Countries, giving his disciples the reason of his choice. "Brothers," said he, "I am attracted to Paris despite myself, not only because it is the capital of that France I love so much, but also and chiefly because it is the place where the adorable sacrament of our altars is most honoured." May the Catholics of Paris always deserve such high praise!

The hour of separation approached. The holy

Patriarch, having reassembled the future apostles, gave them his last instructions, in which we find drawn by a master hand the picture of the missionary religious. "Brethren," said he, "go in the name of the Lord, walking, two by two, humbly and modestly, observing a strict silence from morning until after tierce, raising your hearts to God in prayer. Let no idle or useless word be heard among you. Although you may be travelling, your conduct should be as humble and poor as if you were in a hermitage, or in your cell; for wherever we go we should always carry our cell with us. Our brother the body is our cell, and our soul is the hermit who inhabits it, and whose duty is to think of God and pray to Him. If a religious does not live in peace in the cell of his body, exterior cells will hardly be any use to him. Let your demeanour in the world be such that whoever will see or hear you will be moved to devotion, and praise the heavenly Father, to whom all glory belongs. Announce peace to all; but let it be still more in your inmost hearts than upon your lips. Be not the cause of anger or scandal to any one; on the contrary, by your mildness, attract everybody to benignity, concord, and union. To cure the sick, to console those who weep, to bring back the poor wanderers—that is your vocation! There are some who may seem to you to be the members of the devil, and who will one day be the disciples of Jesus Christ.*"

After this discourse he gave his children his blessing and the kiss of peace, and bade them farewell; and the missionaries quitted Our Lady of Angels, as the apostles quitted the cenacle on the morrow of Pentecost, to go and scatter the good seed of the Gospel to the four winds of heaven. The sorrow of separation was

* *Legend of the Three Companions.*

soothed by the certitude of going whither obedience sent them, and the hope of giving to Jesus Christ souls hungering for light and love. He himself set out with Brother Masseo for his dear mission of France; but he wished to first commend its success to the holy apostles Peter and Paul, and pray at their tomb. Half way to Rome both pilgrims, succumbing to fatigue, stopped at the gates of a town to enjoy a little repose and take their modest meal. They seated themselves under a large tree whose interlacing branches overshadowed a fountain, and placed upon a stone the old crusts of bread they had just begged. Francis could not restrain his transports of joy at this sight. "O Brother Masseo," he cried, "let us give thanks to God for the treasure He has given us!" Several times he repeated the same words, and each time in a more elevated and joyous tone of voice. "What treasure are you speaking of?" asked Masseo, with astonishment, "we are in want of everything!" "The great treasure," pursued the saint, "is that in extreme penury, Providence comes to our succour so admirably, and supplies us with this bread, this fresh water, this shade, and even this stone that serves us as a table." Then they ate with gladness the bread of angels, according to the beautiful expression of Francis, and drank the pure well water, out of the hollow of their hands." *

Having resumed their way they entered into the first church they came to, when the holy Patriarch prayed Our Lord to give to him and his children the love of holy poverty; and so ardent was his prayer that his countenance seemed to emit flames. In this ecstatic state he advanced with open arms towards Brother Masseo, calling him with aloud voice. When

* Bernard of Besse.

Masseo ran to throw himself into his arms he was raised several cubits into the air, solely by the breath of the Blessed Francis, and felt his soul inundated with such consolation that he often protested afterwards that he never experienced anything like it.

After this rapture the servant of God said some admirable things about the excellence of holy poverty, and commented upon that beautiful text of the gospel: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." *

On their arrival in Rome, both immediately repaired to the basilica of S. Peter's, the end of their pilgrimage, and began to pray. Now, while Francis was supplicating the holy apostles Peter and Paul with tears to teach him the apostolic life and perfect poverty, they appeared to him in a blaze of light, tenderly embraced him, and said, "Brother Francis, Our Lord Jesus Christ sent us to tell you that He has heard your prayers and tears on the subject of holy poverty, that poverty He Himself embraced, as well as His glorious Mother, and which we, His apostles, have practised after His example. He grants this treasure to you and your children; those who shall carefully preserve it, will be rewarded with the kingdom of God." Francis rose full of joy, told his vision to Friar Masseo, and they both went to prostrate themselves in thanksgiving upon the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles.

Meanwhile Innocent III., one of the greatest Popes God has given His Church, died at Perugia on the 16th of July 1216, after a pontificate of eighteen years and six months. Two days after, Cardinal Censio Savelli ascended the chair of S. Peter under the name of Honorius III. The Friars Minors received the

* Matthew viii. 20.

same favour and protection from him as from his predecessors.

It was the hour chosen by God to unite the two apostles of the thirteenth century. Who does not admire, in passing, the secret harmony God had, unknown to them, established between those two men, and which, sooner or later, was to bring them together. Both had laid the foundations of their Institutes almost at the same time, the one at the foot of the Apennines, the other at the foot of the Pyrenees; for both, an ancient sanctuary dedicated to the Mother of God, Our Lady of Angels and Our Lady of Prouille, had been the corner stone of their edifices; both, styling themselves Knights of Mary, made all the honour of their superhuman victories redound to their august protectress, and from their breasts naturally broke forth that cry the Church places upon our lips, *Gaude, Maria Virgo, cunctas hæreses sola interemisti in universo mundo.* ("Rejoice, O Virgin, for thou alone hast de stroyed all heresies in the whole world.")

There were other points of contact, too, between the holy Patriarchs. Both had opened their apostolic career by a pilgrimage to Rome; both had returned thither to obtain the approval of their Orders. Innocent III. had repulsed them both; then, on account of the same miraculous vision, had simultaneously blessed their enterprises. Both revived the esteem and practice of holy poverty; and each of them, embracing all times and all peoples, all ages and all conditions in his zeal, united three distinct militias under one standard. The same Cardinal (Ugolini) was protector of both Orders, the same Pope (Honorius III.) confirmed them by apostolic bulls; another Pope (Gregory IX.) inscribed the founders in the calendar of saints.

"Finally, the two greatest doctors of all ages simultaneously flourished upon their tombs, S. Thomas upon that of S. Dominic, S. Bonaventure upon that of S. Francis." *

And yet, strange to relate, despite their fraternal vocations, those two men did not know each other. They had lived in Rome at the time of the fourth Council of Lateran, but without their hearing each other's names. One word gives us the key to this enigma. God had elected to be Himself, and by a prodigy, the connecting link of their heavenly friendship.

One night while the Patriarch of the Friars Preachers was in prayer in the basilica of S. Peter's, he saw the Saviour of men enraged with the world, and brandishing three fiery darts wherewith to exterminate the proud, the avaricious, and the impure; and Mary, His august Mother, who was disarming Him and imploring the pardon of the guilty, presenting to Him two poor men with this promise, "Here are two faithful servants who will cause faith and the evangelical virtues to reflourish everywhere." Dominic recognised himself in one of them, but he did not know who the other was, only his companion's figure remained deeply engraven in his memory. The next day he was leaving the church of S. Peter, when, raising his eyes, he recognised in the garb of a beggar the figure of that mysterious friend whom heaven had shown him. He immediately rushes up to him, and the two saints, recognising each other, although they had never met before, are locked in a long and silent embrace. Dominic at last breaks silence and relates the vision he had been favoured with the night before, adding,

* *Life of S. Dominic*, by Lacordaire.

"Francis, you are my companion; we will labour together; let us remain united, and no one can prevail against us."

The kiss of the two great Patriarchs has been transmitted from generation to generation, and the unchangeable friendship that united them still survives in the hearts of their children. The Friars Preachers and Friars Minors have pitched their tents in every clime; together they have prayed, together they have pruned the Lord's vineyard, and more than once the blood of their martyrs has commingled in the same sacrifice for the faith. They have vied in peopling the earth with convents, and heaven with saints; but the breath of jealousy has never tarnished the stainless crystal of a friendship six centuries old.

This union of the two Orders has translated itself into their respective liturgies, and even into the traditions of private life. Every year, when time brings round the feast of S. Dominic, the solemn office of the Friars Preachers is chanted by a Franciscan Father. After Mass, the religious of the two Orders together break the bread that Providence sends them, in fraternal love feasts; and in the song of thanksgiving that follows the repast they alternately repeat this refrain: "*Pater Seraphicus et Pater evangelicus Dominicus ipsi nos docuerunt legem tuam, Domine.*" "Seraphic Father Francis and evangelical Father Dominic have taught us your law, O Lord!" On the 4th of October, the feast of S. Francis of Assisi, there is an interchange of these ceremonies in the convent of the Friars Minors. It is the same in every city, where the convents of the two Orders stand near enough to each other, for the religious to alternately pay each other this testimony of reciprocal affection—touching

custom which carries us back to the grandest period of the Church, and presents to the contemplation of modern pagans the inimitable spectacle of thousands of men having only one heart and one soul.

If there are few more charming scenes than the meeting of the two holy Patriarchs, we know none grander than their leave-taking on the hills of Rome. Standing on Mount Aventine, twelve centuries after S. Peter and S. Paul had taken possession of it, those two poor followers of Jesus Christ, with one glance to heaven and another towards the earth, conceive a plan of more than human audacity: they divide the world between them, to reconquer it for their Divine King. Their ambition, like that of the two apostles, embraces all nations; their success will likewise surpass all human foresight. In effect, they will bring the people back to the Gospel yoke, and that by the two greatest powers in the world, knowledge and love. Dominic and his children, who seem to hold in the Church militant the rank the cherubim occupy in the heavenly hierarchy, will propagate sacred science and defend the truth; Francis and his sons, burning with the ardour of the seraphim, will pour out torrents of light and love upon the world. *

Our saint quitted the Eternal City in the autumn of 1216, his soul filled with the perfume of memories and consolations. From the banks of the Tiber he cast a glance full of hope towards that fair kingdom of France, whose name alone caused his heart to beat with the sweetest emotions, and for which he felt such an irresistible attraction. Who shall say what magnificent

* S. Thomas is the glory of the Order of S. Dominic; Alexander of Hales, Duns Scotus, and S. Bonaventure honour the Order of S. Francis.

projects he was then revolving in his mind, and which are born, as it were spontaneously, in an ardent soul, an apostolic heart? He did not know that another was to realise them. And in effect Cardinal Ugolino, whom he visited at Florence in July 1217, having learned from his lips the approaching extension of the Friars Minors, completely dissuaded him for the moment from such a distant journey. "My son," said the venerable prelate to him, "you may count upon my attachment. But your Institute is in its infancy; you know what opposition it has met with at the Court of Rome; you have still secret enemies there; your presence, therefore, is indispensable to consolidate your work." The man of God, always humble and docile, even when he had to sacrifice his dearest wishes, submitted to the Cardinal's authority, and sent Brothers Pacificus, Angelo, and Albert of Pisa in his stead. For himself, he chiefly evangelised the valley of Rieti; and it is at this work we find him employed from his return from Rome to the middle of the year 1219. He quitted his apostolic labours, however, from time to time, to return to Our Lady of Angels to gain renewed strength in prayer, to look after his brethren and novices, or to visit other foundations.

The most important occurrence of this epoch of his life, that which was the object of his most constant preoccupations, was the holding of the second Chapter-General, which he had fixed for Pentecost 1219. Early in May he went to Perugia to confer with Cardinal Ugolino on the measures to be adopted in this assembly. S. Dominic was present at the conference. "Would you approve of some of your disciples being raised to ecclesiastical dignities?" asked the

Cardinal Legate. The two Patriarchs made the same reply. "For my part," said S. Dominic, "I know no greater honour than to be the bearers of the divine word, and the bucklers of the faith. Leave the Friars Preachers, then, to their vocation." "My lord," said S. Francis in his turn, "my children call themselves Friars Minors, because they occupy the lowest rank in the Church. That is their post of honour; beware, therefore, of taking them away from it on the pretext of elevating them higher." The Cardinal did not share their view; but their spirit of abnegation was none the less a subject of great edification to him.

According to Brother Leo, who accompanied him, the question of recasting the two Orders into one was mooted in this interview, but the seraphic Patriarch was opposed to it. "The will of God," said he, "is that they remain separate, in order that each one may freely select one or other of the two Rules." Dominic then begged him to at least give him the poor cord that girded his loins, as a symbol of the fraternal charity that united them and their spiritual families. "I will always wear it," said he, "under my white habit." Francis long refused, through humility, but the charity of the pious supplicant finally prevailed. Such was the origin of a devotion that rapidly extended throughout the whole Church, and which Sixtus V., of the Order of Friars Minors, three centuries later erected into an archconfraternity, under the name of the Archconfraternity of the Cord of S. Francis.*

After having regulated the affairs of the Order, in concert with the Cardinal protector, the saint took leave of his two friends, and returned to Our Lady of Angels. On the way he had a delightful conversation

* Bull of November 19, 1585.

with his companion on the virtue of humility. "Dear sheep of the good God," said he, "the Chapter is approaching; now, it seems to me I would not be a true Friar Minor if, hearing our brethren declare that they do not want an ignoramus and a sinner like me any longer at their head, I did not listen to these insults with perfect serenity of soul, and rejoice at being deposed from my office. Know well, Brother Leo, superior positions are often an occasion of sin, and always carry with them a dread responsibility, while there is everything to be gained by humiliations, and in the condition of simple subject." Beautiful words in which the soul of Francis is depicted as in a mirror! Would to heaven that men tempted by ambition had them always before their eyes! What disillusionisings, crimes, and remorse they would spare their old age!

At length the epoch of the Chapter-General arrived: it was the 26th of May 1219, ever-memorable day, which has left a luminous track in the annals of the Seraphic Order. On that day everything invited the brethren to rejoice. The Church was celebrating the solemnity of Pentecost, and had assumed its festal decorations; nature, too, was clothed in its richest spring vesture, the air was fresh and pure, the sun rose radiant and majestic on the summit of the Apennines, and poured torrents of light over the valley of Spoleto. The traveller who had alighted at Assisi at that morning hour might have contemplated a spectacle perhaps unique in the world,—hundreds of sheds erected in the plain, and hundreds of religious assembled round the modest sanctuary of Portiuncula! To see them abstracted like angels, with bent brows as if filled with the divine *afflatus*,

he had naturally supposed that something strange was going on in that chapel, and he would not have been deceived. In effect, what a sight! Cardinal Ugolino officiating pontifically, Francis assisting at the Holy Sacrifice with five thousand of his brethren, and Dominic with seven of his disciples; * the angels ascending to the throne of the Eternal Father to offer Him the blood of the Spotless Victim as well as the prayers of men, and then descending to earth laden with graces and benedictions; in fine, all heaven listening attentively to the poor followers of Christ; once more, what a scene, and what a delightful relief to the mind's eye in the midst of so many that sadden and weary us here below!

After Mass, the Cardinal protector solemnly opened the Chapter over which he presided. In the evening he was pleased, like the general of an army, to review the numerous phalanxes of soldiers of Jesus Christ who camped in the plain under huts constructed of branches of trees and mats.† He found them assembled in groups of sixty or a hundred, recounting the joys and sufferings of the apostolate, the deeds of their blessed Father, or the wonders they had worked in his name, repeating what our Lord's disciples said when they returned from their first mission, "The devils also are subject to us in thy name." ‡

Like the patriarch Jacob of yore, the venerable old man exclaimed with admiration at this sight, "Friars

* Was it at the Chapter of Mats, or later, there were five thousand? Was S. Dominic there, or on another occasion? These two points have been always disputed. *The Acts of the Saints* have it that there was a transposition of dates. In our uncertainty we have followed Wadding.

† Hence the name of Chapter of Mats.

‡ Luke x.

Minors, this is indeed the camp of God!"* It was, in fact, the Great King's *armée d'élite*, a pacific yet conquering army, unarmed yet all powerful, admirably disciplined and full of heroism, to which might be applied the words of the Sacred Scriptures, "How beautiful are thy standards, O Jacob! How beautiful are thy tents, O Israel!" Francis, raising his eyes to heaven with a look full of gratitude, and thanking the Lord for having multiplied his children like the sand on the sea-shore, poured out his heart in burning words that revived in the souls of his disciples the love of God and of their vocation, zeal for souls, and devotion to the Church of Rome. "Brothers," said he in conclusion, "we have promised great things; we are promised greater still. Let us keep the one; let us sigh after the other. Pleasure is short, the punishment is eternal; sufferings are light, the glory is infinite. Many are called, few are chosen: all will receive what they shall have merited."

Timid minds might have asked, "Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?"† The holy Patriarch and his children had no doubt or disquietude. They were there, destitute of everything, but full of confidence, waiting for their daily bread from the Creator like the birds of the air; and Providence did not fail them. Men of every condition, clerics and laymen, upper classes and lower classes, came from Assisi, Perugia, Foligno, and even Spoleto, and, not satisfied with bringing the necessary provisions for the poor followers of Christ, carried charity so far as to serve them with their own hands, and this as long as the Chapter lasted.

A crowd of persons came through pure curiosity,

* Gen. xxxii. † John vi.

attracted by the novelty of the spectacle, and God availed of it to touch their hearts. Some of the visitors were particularly struck with the Friars' hard, austere life, and said to themselves, "Here is what shows us how narrow is the way to heaven, and how difficult it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! We flatter ourselves we can secure our salvation without depriving ourselves of any of the world's pleasures or giving up our ease, while these good Friars deprive themselves of everything, and still tremble! We would like to die like them, but we will not live like them; and yet, 'as a man liveth so shall he die.' Others remarked the heavenly expression of their countenances, the graceful smile on their lips, the alacrity with which they helped each other, the divine peace that was reflected in the mild light of their eyes. "They are angels," they pondered; "they only touch the ground with the tips of their feet; but their thoughts and their affections are of another land. What hinders us from sharing their happiness?" And a goodly number of them—more than five hundred—threw themselves at the feet of Francis, and asked for the holy habit of penitence. Thus, the good odour of the Friars' virtues filled the whole valley of Spoleto, and produced living fruit.

It is well to note here that, great a lover of simplicity as the holy founder was, he was equally the enemy of all exaggeration. Having learned that several of his disciples were practising immoderate mortifications, he ordered all the instruments of penance to be laid before the Cardinal. The number of coats of mail and iron girdles exceeded five hundred. Francis sternly forbade such mortifications, considering them prejudicial to

spiritual exercises and the practice of good works. Oh, happy time when there were such faults to reprove!

The revival of the religious spirit, the increase of fervour, and the conquest of new disciples were not the only results of the Chapter of Mats. They drew up the following very important statutes, which fixed the glorious destinies of the Seraphic Order:—

1. "Every Saturday a solemn Mass, in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculate, shall be celebrated in all our convents." By this prescription, due to the initiative of the Seraphic Patriarch, the Order of Friars Minors—and it is its glory, and perhaps the reason of its existence—took Mary Immaculate for its protectress and patron, and six centuries in advance heralded the great dogma of the Immaculate Conception. We know the fact; but who will tell us the cause? That a man little versed in sacred science—the pauper of Assisi, in a word—should suddenly throw light upon one of the longest veiled truths of the Catholic religion; that he should direct attention thereto by transmitting it through the private traditions and public worship of a whole religious family; that he should afterwards explain the mystery by laying down this solid principle in presence of his children, "Fear not to attribute to Mary all that is not repugnant to her dignity as Mother of God,'—is such a prodigy humanly explicable? or must it not be admitted, with a learned Dominican of Sienna, that this holy man's theology, borne on the wings of purity and contemplation, rose like an eagle in its flight, and was wholly derived from his supernatural communications with the Holy Spirit? Hence taught by this Doctor of doctors, assured of the place Mary holds in the divine plan, could Francis have done better than bequeath this truth to his children,

as the most precious treasure of their inheritance? His hope was not deceived; his disciples defended and propagated the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception with unswerving fidelity, and made it so much their own that it was called "the Franciscan thesis."

On her side, the Queen of heaven appeared to take a pleasure in raising up a legion of doctors and apostles in the Order capable of securing the triumph of her cause; and, under her inspiration, Anthony of Padua, Bonaventure,* Bernardine of Sienna, Duns Scotus, Leonard of Port Maurice, Thomas of Charmes, and D'Argenton, descended in turn into the lists for the honour of being the champions of Mary. It would take too long to describe all the phases of a struggle that lasted six centuries; but there are two events we cannot silently pass over, because they are the logical consequence of the principle posed by S. Francis—the famous victory of Duns Scotus in the fourteenth, and the promulgation of the dogma in the nineteenth, century.

Every one knows the division that prevailed in the Middle Ages between the Dominican and Franciscan schools on the subject of the Immaculate Conception. To put an end to controversies, sometimes too impassioned, Pope Benedict XI., in 1304, ordered a public discussion in the University of Paris. Duns Scotus was charged by F. Gonzalvo, General of the Friars Minors, with representing the Order at this new kind of tournament, and there upholding the traditional and pious belief of the Franciscans; and for this purpose he went from Oxford to Paris. After preparing for the discussion by retreat, fasting, and prayer, he repaired to the

* The Seraphic Doctor, after publicly teaching that Mary was not exempt from original sin, reverted to the traditions of the Order in his sermons and the ordinances of the Chapters-General.

University. On his way he passed a marble statue of the Blessed Virgin, which adorned the portal of the Sainte Chapelle, and saluted it with this versicle of the Catholic liturgy, "*Dignare me laudare te, Virgo sacrata; da mihi virtutem contra hostes tuos.*" The statue bowed its head, as if to signify its assent, and ever after maintained that attitude. Arrived at the Sorbonne, Duns Scotus found himself in presence of an imposing assembly and of adversaries worthy of him. The Friars Preachers unfolded two hundred arguments which went to show that Mary was included in the decree of the original anathema. The young Franciscan listened, calm and collected. When they had concluded, he rose in his turn, went over the two hundred arguments in the same order in which they had been proposed (which is difficult to account for without a miraculous assistance from his protectress), and refuted them all with irresistible eloquence. The University, as well as the Pope's Legates, overwhelmed him with applause, bestowed upon him the title of the Subtile Doctor,* and decreed that in future it would celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception every year. A century later the Sorbonne decided not to confer the grade of Doctor until the candidate had sworn to always uphold the grand prerogative of Mary. But the hour had not yet come for the Holy See to pronounce an irrevocable judgment. It was reserved to these later times to assist at the glorious issue of this theological contest. On the 8th of December 1854, ever-memorable day, a Pope of the Third Order of S. Francis, the immortal Pius IX., placed upon the brow of Mary the most brilliant diamond in her crown, proclaiming her immaculate

* Subtile here signifies perspicuous.

from her conception; and at that solemn moment, by a signal favour, he allowed two Generals of the Friars Minors to present him with a golden and a silver lily. It was the greatest reward he could have bestowed in honour of the zeal of the Franciscan family in publishing the grandeurs and privileges of Mary.

2. "A special memento of the holy apostles Peter and Paul shall be made in the prayers, *Protege nos, Domine*, and *Exaudi nos, Deus.*" By this liturgical prayer, Francis not only drew closer the bonds that, from its birth, attached the Order to the Church of Rome, Mother and Mistress of all the Churches; he also inaugurated among his children that devotion to the Pope which was, and ever will be, the distinctive characteristic of his triple family.

3. "No convent or church shall be accepted that is not conformable to the holy poverty we have promised in the rule." Thanks to this decision, the Friars Minors have always preserved architectural beauty in adhering to architectural simplicity.

Such are the celebrated ordinances of the Chapter of Mats,—ordinances that concern the inner life of the Order and give its original physiognomy. Still Francis did not forget the exterior, that is to say, the salvation of souls. Keeping in view his providential mission, which was to rescue Christian or infidel nations from the empire of Satan, he laid down a vast plan of action, which took in every part of the globe, and which his sons will carry out to the end of time. For himself and twelve of his brethren he selected Egypt and Syria, assigning to others their respective destinations. Among so many evangelical toilers, we will content ourselves with naming the principal missionary leaders: Friar Bernard, who set out for Morocco, and whom the holy

founder was never to see again until he rejoined him in heaven; Friar Pacificus, who returned to France; Friar Christopher of Romagna, who went to evangelise Guienne;* and Angelo of Pisa, to whose lot fell Great Britain. Their obedience or credentials were couched in these terms: "I, Friar Francis of Assisi, Minister-General, command you, Brother Angelo of Pisa, in the name of obedience, to go to England, and there discharge the office of Minister-Provincial. Farewell." † It was short, but it was enough; for it was God who sent them.

It was a bold undertaking, but quite conformable to the spirit of propagandism that distinguishes the true Church of Christ. Honorius III., then at Viterbo, approved and sanctioned it by his apostolic authority, forwarding to the brethren a letter in this strain: "Honorius, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to the archbishops, bishops, abbots, deans, archdeacons, and other ecclesiastical superiors: As Our dear son, Friar Francis, and his companions have renounced the vanities of the world, to embrace a kind of life upon which the Church of Rome has bestowed its approbation, and go forth, like the Apostles, to announce the Divine Word everywhere, We beg and conjure you in Our Lord, and enjoin you by these letters apostolic, to receive in quality of Catholics and faithful the brethren of this Order, bearers of these presents, who shall apply to you, to be favourable to them and treat them kindly for the honour of God and through consideration of Us.

* He died in the odour of sanctity at Cahors, aged 100, on the 31st of October 1272. Friar Pacificus ended his life holily at Lens, in Artois, after founding the convents of Paris, Lens, Saint Tron, Valenciennes, Arras, Ghent, Bruges, and Oudenarde.

† The original of this obedience is preserved at Mount Alverno.

Given this third day of the ides of June, the third year of Our pontificate."

The missionary leaders, besides, were the bearers of two circulars from the Seraphic Patriarch, who recommended them to zealously give them publicity. The first, addressed to priests, contained touching instructions upon the respect due to the Eucharist, and that remarkable advice about the Sacred Scriptures: "If you find the most holy Name of our Lord or any passage of the Bible in indecent places, I beg you collect them respectfully and place them in some suitable place."

The second circular was couched thus: "To all rulers of peoples, consuls, judges, and magistrates all over the whole world, and to all those who shall receive these letters, your miserable little servant in our Lord, Friar Francis, sends you greeting and peace. Consider attentively, that the hour of death is approaching. I conjure you, therefore, with the profoundest respect, not to forget God on account of worldly cares, and not to violate His commandments; for He in turn will forget and curse all those who forget or contemn His laws. At the hour of death they will be stripped of all their goods; and the more powerful they shall have been in this world, the more they will be tormented in hell. That is why I exhort you—you whom I look upon as my lords—before all to do penance sincerely for your faults, to humbly and lovingly receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in memory of His Passion, to refer to God the honour He does you in confiding to you the government of His people, and be careful to warn your subjects every evening by some signal to adore the Omnipotent Lord and return Him thanks. If you fail in these obligations, know that you will

have to render an account for it at the day of judgment. Those who well preserve this writing and observe its directions will be blessed of God."

And the missionaries took to the road the day after the Chapter, fortified with the triple benediction of Heaven, of the Sovereign Pontiff, and of their blessed Father.

CHAPTER X.

Mission in the East—The Martyrs of Morocco—S. Anthony of Padua.

(*1219–1221.*)

It must not be thought that Francis was indifferent to the political events of his time, particularly that great Eastern question which, ever since the Council of Clermont, continued to move the world—we mean the Crusades. Since the taking of Jerusalem by Godefroy de Bouillon, Europe was an armed camp; and for more than two centuries the military history of Christendom is nothing else than a narrative of the profoundly interesting and interminable struggle, a hundred times interrupted and a hundred times renewed, between the two gigantic armies that disputed possession of the Holy places, that is to say, between the soldiers of Christ and of Mahomet.

Behind those chivalrous combats resplendent with the brilliant valour of the West, our saint discerned a higher conflict, the conflict between the Cross and the Crescent, between the true God and the false prophet, between Christian civilisation and Mussulman barbarism; and faith, in accord with patriotism, inspired him with ardent wishes for the success of

this colossal undertaking, which, judged even by its results, would alone have reflected honour on the Popes and glorified the Middle Ages. In effect, did it not succeed in saving Europe and driving back into the sands of the desert the sectaries of Islam and their brutalising doctrines?

Four times already the West had risen *en masse* to rush to the conquest of the Holy Land; but, despite the brave and heroic efforts of the successors of Godefroy de Bouillon, the Sacred City was only subject to their sceptre at intervals; and at the time we refer to, it had again fallen under the odious yoke of the Abbassides. Europe, grief-wrung at this news, which was regarded as a public misfortune, promptly took up arms at the call of Pope Honorius III., and more than 400,000 men mustered under the banner of John of Brienne, titular King of Jerusalem. But this time, in place of directly attacking Palestine, the Crusaders, wishing to strike at the heart of the Moslem empire, poured down upon Egypt and laid siege to Damietta, thus putting into execution the strategy of Innocent III. The plan was bold but difficult; and Christendom watched with anxiety the vicissitudes of this distant expedition.

The Patriarch of Assisi thought it was a favourable opportunity of planting the Cross on those infidel shores or fertilising them with his blood. After placing the government of the Order in the hands of Brother Elias, he repaired to Ancona, without any other arm than the Cross, and embarked for the Levant with eleven of his disciples, miraculously designated by a little child,* among whom we count Peter of Catana, Barbari, Sabbatino, Leonardo of Assisi, and Illuminato

* Bartholomew of Pisa.

of Rieti. It was in the month of June 1219. The ship that carried the missionaries first anchored off the coasts of Cyprus and then at Saint Jean d'Acre, an important city of Syria, where Francis left ten of his disciples to keep alive the faith and courage of the Catholics severely oppressed by the Saracens. As to our saint, he set sail for Egypt with Fra Illuminato, and disembarked near Damietta. Discord and confusion then reigned in the camp of the Crusaders. Cavaliers and infantry, massed for more than a year under the city walls, reproached each other with treason and cowardice; both sides became hot-headed as in a popular riot, and, to show their mettle, clamoured loudly to be led out to battle. To avoid the effusion of Christian blood, John of Brienne yielded to their foolish entreaties, and it was decided to give battle the next day, August 29, 1219.

Meanwhile, the Seraphic Patriarch reached the camp. Warned from on high that, in punishment of their pride and intestine divisions, they were to experience a sanguinary defeat, he pondered on the way over the means of preventing such a calamity. "Brother," said he to his companion, "the Lord has revealed to me that if they come to blows the Christians will be beaten. If I say so openly, I shall be treated as a fool; if I do not say it, the secret will trouble me like remorse. What do you think?" "Father," the Friar replied, "don't let the judgment of men hinder you; it is not now that they treat you as a madman. Unburthen your conscience, and fear God rather than men." Fortified by this advice, Christ's herald penetrates into the general's tent, conjures the chief to reject the fatal inspirations of jealousy, and predicts great reverses if they persist in their design

of giving battle. Prayers, menaces,—all are useless. Blinded and stirred up by passion, they mistake the saint's predictions for reveries, and the battle begins in the midst of torrid heat. The rest is known. "On that fatal day," says S. Bonaventure, "the Christians lost 6000 men, killed or made prisoners. Enlightened by disaster they realised that they had done wrong to despise the wisdom of the poor follower of Christ; for the eye of the just man sometimes descries the truth better than seven soldiers stationed as sentinels on the mountain's crest."

The servant of God, undismayed by this momentary reverse, resolved to pursue his undertaking. Vainly they represented to him that his life was at stake, and that the Sultan had promised a golden bezant (£2) to whoever would bring him the head of a Christian; nothing could relax his zeal. Persuaded with the Apostle, that death is a gain, and martyrdom the most desirable of crowns in this world, he advanced towards the camp of the Saracens, chanting that canticle of the royal prophet: "The Lord leadeth me. For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me."* Wending his way he saw two sheep, a sight at which he greatly rejoiced, saying to his companion, "Brother, let us have confidence in the Lord; for we see the accomplishment of those words of the Gospel, 'Behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves.'" A little farther on, a band of Saracens, rushing at the two servants of God like wolves pouncing upon sheep, overwhelmed them with blows and insults, and then loaded them with chains. "I am a Christian," exclaimed Francis in a firm voice; "lead me to your master." The

* Psalm xxii.

Mamelukes obeyed, and dragged the two prisoners before the Sultan Meledin. As soon as the latter perceived them, "Who sent you?" he asks abruptly. "And what do you want here?" The saint replied, unmoved, "It was not man, but the Most High, that sent me to announce to you and your people the glad tidings of the Gospel and the truths of salvation." Immediately he began to explain to him the mysteries of the Catholic religion, one God in three persons, and Jesus Christ true God and Saviour of the world, and so forcibly, that in him was once more verified the promise of the Divine Master, "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to resist and gainsay." *

The barbarian prince hung upon the lips of the saint, and was seized with an unaccountable emotion. That masculine intrepidity, that superhuman devotion, which he now saw for the first time displayed before his eyes, subdued his soul and inclined him to clemency. For some days he gave audience to Francis to the great astonishment of all, and even invited him to remain with him. "If you and your people," replied the man of God, "will be converted to Christ, I will willingly remain with you. If you hesitate between the Gospel and the law of Mahomet, cause a great fire to be enkindled, I will enter it along with your priests, and you will judge by the result upon what side the truth is." "I do not believe," replied Meledin, "that any of my imans would consent to face the flames and torments for the defence of his faith." He said this, because he had remarked that, at Francis's proposition, one of the oldest and highest of them prudently slipped away.

* Luke xxi.

The servant of God went further, and said to the Sultan, "If you promise me in your name and that of your people to embrace the Christian religion, I will go to the stake alone. If the flames devour me, impute it to my sins; but if I come out safe and sound, you will recognise Jesus Christ as the sole true God and Saviour of all men." The Sultan, weak as all despots are, and trembling before those who trembled at his feet, dared not accept this trial by fire, fearing a popular sedition. He offered the saint, instead, rich presents; but, vainly entreated, Francis, eager only for the salvation of souls, and not seeing the love of truth enkindled in the heart of the infidel prince, rejected the gold and precious stuffs with an imperious gesture as if they were mud. Meledin, far from being offended at this refusal, appreciated the nobleness of such perfect detachment, and the respect and admiration with which from the first he had treated the servant of God was increased; so, after privately saying to him, "Pray for me, that the Most High may cause me to know the true religion," he gave him an honourable safe conduct to the Christian camp.

Francis, seeing his hopes shattered, and not knowing what line of conduct he should adopt, as usual had recourse to prayer; and the seraphic doctor, from whom we take all these details, adds that it was not in vain. Our Lord enlightened and consoled him by a supernatural vision, ordering him to return to Italy, and assuring him that it was not in Egypt nor by the sword he was to gather the coveted martyr's palm. The saint then said to his companion, "Let us leave this place, brother; let us fly, fly far from those barbarians too humane to us, since we can neither compel them to adore our Master or persecute us, His servants. O

God! when shall we deserve the martyr's triumph, if we are honoured even among the most unbelieving peoples? Since God does not judge us worthy of the glory of martyrdom, nor of sharing in its opprobrium, let us go, brother, let us pass the remainder of our lives in the martyrdom of penance, or seek some spot of earth where we may drink deep draughts of the ignominy of the Cross." *

How long was he in the tents of the Crusaders? What was the extent of his influence in re-establishing the spirit of concord and discipline among them? Did he visit Palestine on his return from Egypt? Upon all these questions we have nothing precise; only here is what we read in a contemporary author, as impartial as he was well informed, James of Vitry, Bishop of Saint Jean d'Acre and Legate of the Holy See with the Christian army.

"We have seen," he writes to his Lorraine friends on the morrow of the taking of Damietta;† "we have seen the founder of the Friars Minors, Francis, a man of extraordinary amiability and venerated by everybody, even the infidels; several of our friends, among others, Dom. Reyner, prior of S. Michael's, and Matthew, to whom we had confided the government of our diocese, have decided on entering this new institute, and we learn that it has already extended its branches throughout the whole world, precisely because it is the perfect imitation of the life of the Apostles and early Christians." According to Mariana, all the religious of a Benedictine monastery on the Black Mountain embraced the Seraphic Rule. An immemorial tradition found in the principal authors of the

* Bossuet.

† The Crusaders took Damietta on November 5, 1219.

Order has it that Francis, on his return from Egypt, visited the holy places and evangelised Ptolemaïs, Antioch, and several other Syrian cities. It was only towards the close of autumn, or during the winter of 1219, that he directed his course towards Europe, whither the affairs of his Order called him. He embarked in one of those Venetian vessels then the monarchs of the Mediterranean, which they continually ploughed carrying succour to the Crusaders.

Thus ended S. Francis's pacific crusade in the East. That it was fruitful in results, history is there to attest; who can deny, after six centuries, that his journey in the East was like his taking possession of the Holy Land? Does it not seem that God led him thither, saying to him as of yore He had said to His servant Abraham, "Arise and walk through the land in the length and in the breadth thereof; for I will give it to thee"? * Francis, in fact, came to found a more lasting kingdom than that of Godefroy de Bouillon. Ever since we find the Friars Minors firmly established in Palestine, fulfilling a function as sublime as it is difficult. After the Saviour's resurrection it was an angel guarded the entrance to the tomb; since the thirteenth century it is the children of the Seraphic Patriarch who mount guard day and night around that glorious monument, to protect it from profanation, the Holy See having solemnly confirmed them in this privilege by a bull, dated November 21, 1342.† For

* Gen. xiii. 17.

† To protect the holy places from the persecution of the Turks Robert, King of Sicily, and his wife Sancha bought them from the Sultan of Egypt, and ceded them to the Holy See, and Clement V. confided them to the custody of the Franciscans in 1342. The Sultans of Cairo and Constantinople have sanctioned their legitimate possession by several firmans.

more than six hundred years they have been there watching and praying in the name of the whole Catholic world. Twice massacred to the last man in 1244 and 1368, and immediately replaced by their brethren, braving by turns the scimitar of the Mahometans and the fratricidal hatred of the sectaries of Photius and Luther, like indefatigable sentinels they are ever ready to shed their blood rather than desert the post of honour the incomparable love of Francis for Jesus crucified has procured them. They have twenty houses which are at once hostelries, schools, and convents. At their head is the most reverend father upon whom the Sovereign Pontiffs have bestowed the glorious titles of Prefect of the Missions of Syria, Cyprus, and Egypt, Guardian of Mount Sion and the Holy Sepulchre, and Custodian of the Sacred City. He had even the title and functions of Vicar Apostolic until Pius IX., of immortal memory, restored the patriarchal see of Jerusalem, and, after an interruption of six hundred years, reunited, in the person of Monsignore Valerga, the chain connecting the successors of S. James and S. Simeon. Thus the Franciscans still continue the mission in Asia Minor inaugurated by their blessed Father.*

While the holy founder was evangelising the peoples of the Levant, seeking in vain the martyr's palm, five of his more fortunate children were undergoing cruel suffering for the faith at the hands of the Mussulmans of Spain and Africa, and giving the world the spectacle of heroic constancy in the midst of torments. Bernardo, Pietro, Ottone, Ajuto, and Accursio, such were the names of those predestined men whom God selected as the first-fruits of the Franciscan race. Friar Vitali, whom Francis had placed over them, fell ill at Arragon

* See the *Récits d'un Pèlerin*, par le R. P. Ubald.

and had to forego following his brethren. The five religious, after spending some days in retreat at the convent of Alenco, built by S. Francis, repaired to Coimbra, where the Portuguese court was then held. Queen Uraca, wife of Alphonso II., and Sancha, the king's sister, received them as envoys from heaven, and aided them to fulfil their mission among the infidels. After enduring all sorts of outrages and bad treatment at Seville, then under the dominion of the Moors, they embarked for the city of Morocco, capital and den of the Mahometan empire in Western Africa. Don Pedro, Infant of Portugal, who had taken refuge with the Moors on account of some difference with his brother Alphonso II., greeted respectfully those valiant confessors of the faith, and gave them hospitality in his own palace; only he conjured them to moderate their zeal so as not to expose themselves to new persecutions. But how restrain the stag that is running to slake its thirst at limpid mountain springs? How quench the thirst of sacrifice that devours the apostolic soul? Love is stronger than death. At dawn, the next day, our missionaries quitted their host's house, and traversed the streets and public squares of the city, preaching the divinity of Jesus Christ.

One day while the chief of this blessed band, Friar Berard, who knew Arabic better than his colleagues, mounted on a car, was instructing the people and speaking against Mahomet, the Moorish king passed by, going, according to Oriental custom, to visit the tomb of his ancestors. He took the preacher for a fool, and had him and his companions led back to the Christian territory. But the missionaries baffled the vigilance of their guides and returned to the infidel city. The king, informed of their return, had them

thrown into a dark dungeon, where he left them twenty days without food. In vain God multiplied prodigies in favour of His servants; in vain they saw them quit their prison, as S. John emerged from the caldron of boiling oil, more robust than ever; in vain Berard, like another Moses, struck the ground with his staff, caused a miraculous spring to gush forth in the midst of the sandy desert to refresh the soldiers who were dying of thirst, the king's heart seemed to grow harder with every good deed—nothing could open his eyes. Early in January 1220, the five apostles were again thrown into prison. To know what they had to suffer there, it is enough to know that they had a renegade for jailer. The judge, finding them immovable in their faith, ordered them to be separated and handed over to thirty executioners. Bound hand and foot and with cords round their necks, they dragged them along the ground, after beating them violently until their entrails were almost laid bare, rolled them over fragments of broken glass and bricks, and at night poured vinegar over their bleeding wounds. In the midst of this horrible punishment, they praised the Lord, repeating the canticle of the three children in the fiery furnace of Babylon. During the night the Saviour appeared and consoled them. The guards, seeing a great light and fearing they would escape, rushed in terrified. What was their astonishment to find them calmly and fervently praying to God!

The next day the Moorish chief caused them to be brought into his presence. An infidel, whom they encountered on the way, gave Friar Ottone a rude blow, but his only reply was to offer the other cheek, saying, "God forgive you, for you know not what you do." Arrived at the palace, the king says angrily, "Are you

those impious madmen accused of contemning the true faith and blaspheming against Allah's prophet?" "Prince," they reply, "far from us the thought of contemning the true faith! On the contrary, we are ready to suffer and even to die in its defence; but we hold thy law and its wretched author in horror." The tyrant then has recourse to the temptation which has most power over the human heart, that of honours and pleasures, and, pointing to some women richly adorned, says, "If you will follow the law of Mahomet, I will give thee these women to wife with wealthy doweries, and you will be powerful in my states. If not, you shall perish by the sword." "Prince, we want neither thy women nor thy honours, we leave them to thee; we only seek Jesus Christ. Thou canst invent all sorts of tortures, thou canst take away our life; every punishment seems light to us when we think of the glory of heaven." And their eyes beam with hope and their souls drink deep of immortality as they utter these words. The exasperated tyrant rises, seizes his scimitar, and the martyrs' heads rolled at his feet. It was on the 16th of January 1220.*

At that very moment the princess Sancha, who was at prayer, saw them ascend to heaven, bearing the martyr's palm. Their mutilated bodies, trailed in the mud by the infidels, were piously preserved by the Christians; Don Pedro enclosed those relics in two silver shrines, and returned to Europe with his sacred deposit. Alphonso II. himself went with great ceremony to receive them, and placed them in the church of the Canons Regular of the Holy Cross at Coimbra. Queen Uraca, who was present at this triumphal return, died shortly after, as the holy

* Sixtus V. inscribed them in the Martyrology in 1481.

martyrs predicted; and, at the first news of their victory, Vitali, whom they had been obliged to leave at Saragossa, broke the bonds that still attached him to life, and went to rejoin them in the bosom of God. But the holy Patriarch's transports of joy when he heard of the sufferings and death of his sons are indescribable. Looking upon his Order as for ever consecrated by this baptism of blood, and weeping for joy, "Now," he cried, "I can say with all safety that I have five true Friars Minors." Then, turning towards Spain, he gave his blessing to the convent of Alenço, whence they had gone to martyrdom. "Holy house, sacred soil, thou hast produced and offered to the King of heaven five beautiful purple flowers of the sweetest odour. O holy house, may you be always inhabited by saints."

Such were the first-born of that numerous line of martyrs with which the Order of S. Francis has never ceased to endow the Church, and who are not its least glory before God and men. But what was the result of their sacrifice? Where are the people begotten to the life divine by such a generous holocaust? We cast a glance at those inhospitable shores of Africa in this nineteenth century, and see the land that has drunk the blood of the Franciscan missionaries still seated in the shadow of death. Oh, the depths of the judgments of God upon infidel nations! The same Creator, however, who does not allow a single drop of dew to be lost, will not let a drop of Christian blood fall cold and sterile on the living land; and history attests that the blood of martyrs is at all times the seed of Christian confessors and apostles. In the first age of the Church, the Fathers and Doctors were born of the blood of martyrs; and in like manner, in the

golden age of the Franciscan family, we see an immortal lily, whose brightness and whose perfume gladden the whole Church, rise up from the blood-stained tomb of Friar Berard and his companions; we mean S. Anthony of Padua, who shares with S. Francis the honour of being the grand wonder-worker of the thirteenth century, and of whose life and labours, so intimately bound up with the Seraphic Patriarch, we are going to give a rapid outline.

At the convent of the Holy Cross at Coimbra lived a young religious named Fernando de Bouillon,* grandson of that Vincent de Bouillon who, at the taking of Lisbon from the Moors by the Crusaders, was nominated governor of the conquered city (1147). He afterwards for some time discharged the duties of hospitaller, and it was as such he received the five missionaries of Morocco, when they became great friends. And when he saw their remains brought back resplendent with the aureola of miracles and popular veneration, it came into his mind to enter an Order which he looked upon as a school of martyrs. A miraculous apparition of S. Francis fixed his vocation to the Franciscan life. One evening as he was alone in the convent chapel, pouring out his soul and his aspirations at the foot of the tabernacle, the Patriarch of Assisi appeared to him, and, with an imperious gesture, commanded him to put on the liveries of penitence. Fernando obeyed. The next day, furnished with the authorisation of his prior,

* His father was Martin de Bouillon, of the illustrious house of Godefroy de Bouillon, and his mother Teresa Tavera. The latter was interred in the abbey of S. Vincent, near Lisbon, in a chapel dedicated to her son. Upon her tomb is read this epitaph "*Hic jacet mater sancti Antonii* (Here lies the mother of S. Anthony).

he presented himself at the Franciscan monastery of S. Anthony of Olivarez, and took the Franciscan habit and the name of Anthony, a name by which he will henceforth be known and invoked by the people. He was then (July 1220) twenty-five. After a few months' probation, he solicited and obtained from his superiors permission to go into Africa to evangelise the Moors. But Providence summoned him elsewhere, and destined him to cultivate another field. He had scarcely reached the end of his journey when he became a prey to cruel sufferings; and, understanding therefrom that Heaven was opposed to his designs, re-embarked in the spring of 1221 to return to Portugal, in the hope that his native air would soon restore him to health. Once more a violent tempest frustrated his plans, and cast him on the shores of Sicily.

The Order, however, was not deprived of the glory of martyrdom. While Anthony was regretfully quitting the shores of Africa, seven other religious, who had left Tuscany with the permission of Brother Elias, then Vicar-General, disembarked at Ceuta in the kingdom of Fez, as if to replace him at this post of honour. They were Daniel (Provincial of Calabria), Samuel, Domulus, Leo, Ugolini, Nicholas, and Angelo. They traversed the city crying out, "Jesus Christ is the only true God; there is no salvation but through Him." The chief of the Mussulmans caused them to be brought before his tribunal and put this alternative before them: "Renounce Christ or die." "Apostatise! never!" they firmly replied. They were then condemned to be beheaded; it was what they most ardently desired. On the eve of execution they knelt before Daniel to receive his last blessing, which he gave them in these words: "Let us rejoice in the

Lord; this is truly our festal day, the angels hover round us, heaven opens to receive us, and we shall all obtain the martyr's crown." The next morning they took a farewell embrace of each other, and then walked quickly to the place of execution, like bridegrooms to a nuptial banquet. Their heads fell under the Moorish scimitar on the 10th of October 1221.*

Meanwhile Anthony had repaired with Philip, a Castilian lay brother, to the Chapter-General of S. Mary of Angels (1221). Sent to Bologna, he lived for a whole year withdrawn from the gaze of men in the depths of a solitary grotto at the convent of Monte Paolo, wholly given up to the mortification of the senses and meditation of the Sacred Scriptures; so constant is the Lord to His habit of forming, in the silence of retreat, apostles who are to pour out torrents of life and love and truth upon the world. An extraordinary circumstance revealed the talents of the young religious. The Bishop of Forli having requested him to address a pious exhortation to the candidates for ordination, Anthony took for his text, "Christ became obedient unto death." His language, at first timid and almost halting, soon grew rapid, captivating, impassioned, majestic; his countenance became so luminous and expressive that one could read the various emotions of his soul. The congregation, carried away by surprise, thought they heard an echo of the voice of the prophets and shed tears of happiness. Francis rejoiced at the news when he heard of this oratorical success. He knew that Providence had sent him a superior mind, an apostolic man, and he immediately sent the young Friar permission not only to preach but to

* Leo X. allowed them a public cultus.

teach the highest of all sciences—theology (1222). Here is his letter:—

"To my dearest brother Anthony, Brother Francis wishes health in Christ Jesus: I wish you would teach our brethren sacred theology; yet in such a manner as not to extinguish in yourself or others the spirit of holy prayer, according to the Rule of which we have made profession. Farewell."

In virtue of this order, Anthony taught theology, first at Montpellier, then at Bologna, Padua, Toulouse, and elsewhere. But what distinguishes him above all, is not so much his learning as the prodigious success of his preaching. It would be impossible to describe the entire extent of the influence he exercised over the agitated but profoundly Catholic society of the Middle Ages. When he preached, all work was immediately suspended, as on holidays; judges, advocates, merchants, nobles, and the masses of the people thronged from all sides to hear him. The roads were crowded with cavaliers and great ladies, who walked all night by torchlight to be able to secure places near the pulpit. When he made his appearance there was an indescribable movement in the crowd—not a whisper, not a breath! The panting people drank in with avidity the delightful dew of evangelical doctrine. The apostle's language produced in souls the effect of a spark among sheaves of corn: it stirred, heated, moved them to enthusiasm. Soon tears dropped from their eyes; sobs and cries of repentance drowned the saint's voice; and when he came down from the pulpit, the multitude rushed after him to kiss the hem of his garment. More than once they were obliged to give him a guard of armed men to protect him from the

enthusiastic homage of his auditory.* "No more hatreds, no more wars!" they repeated after him. "Peace is justice rendered to every one! Peace is liberty to do good!" And enemies were seen to publicly give the kiss of reconciliation, robbers restore what they had stolen, and heretics abjure their errors.

At this time all Italy trembled at the very name of the ferocious Ezzelino II., lieutenant and son-in-law of the Emperor Frederick II. Vicenza, Brescia, and Verona taken by assault, had been abandoned to the outrages of a shameless soldiery; and Padua dreaded the same fate. Anthony, entirely devoted to his adopted fellow-citizens, hastens to Verona, with the intrepidity of an Elias enters the palace of this new Achab, goes straight up to Ezzelino, and tells him to his face, "Cruel monster, insatiable tyrant, how long wilt thou unjustly shed the blood of Christians? Think, the hour of judgment will soon strike for thee, and thy punishment will be terrible!" The guards only awaited a signal from their chief to massacre the audacious monk. But Ezzelino, laying aside his natural ferocity and becoming gentler than a lamb, puts his baldrick round his neck, prostrates himself at the feet of the young religious, and promises to satisfy the divine justice, to the great surprise of his sbirri. "I saw," the tyrant afterwards said, accounting for his conduct; "I saw lightnings so menacing flashing from the eyes of this monk, that I was afraid of being precipitated on the instant into the flames of hell." Anthony had triumphed: Padua was spared. In such a manner, eight centuries before, had Pope Leo miraculously stopped the ferocious Attila, justly called the Scourge of God, on the banks of the Mincio. As long as Anthony lived he could bridle the tyrant's brigandage

* Surius.

and scandals. Ezzelino, moreover, did him justice. "He is truly a man of God; he is a saint!" he exclaimed. "He only does his duty in reproving our vices; let him preach in peace."

Who could contemplate the heroic courage of S. Anthony of Padua in presence of tyranny—a courage which forms such a striking contrast to the servility of the Ghibelline lieutenants—without being filled with admiration? And who does not discern in that act of noble independence the image and prelude "of the future political rôle of the militia of Friars Minors, contemporaries of the Italian republics, the natural ally of the weak, the enemy of oppressors whom they neither feared nor needed?" *

Everybody has heard of the famous miracle of Rimini; but everybody does not know that the saint performed a similar prodigy on the strand at Amalfi in the Gulf of Salerno (1222). As we have more circumstantial details of the first we will record them here, and our readers will only have to change the names, places, and dates to have the whole history of the second.

One day S. Anthony, after striving in vain to convert the heretics of Rimini, said to them from the pulpit, "Follow me to the mouth of the Marecchia, you who refuse to believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and you will witness marvels that will help you to admit greater." When they reached the sea-shore, he cried, "Fishes of the river and the ocean, listen! I am going to announce the Word of God to you, since the heretics refuse to hearken to it." At this invitation, a multitude of fishes, as if they understood him, ranged themselves opposite the preacher, the smallest in front and the biggest behind.

* Ozanam.

"Fishes, my little brethren," said he, "you owe unbounded gratitude to our Creator. It is He who gave you these immense reservoirs for your dwelling-place, and the depths of the ocean as a refuge from storms. It was He who preserved you while the waters of the deluge engulfed all who were not in Noah's ark. He selected you to save the prophet Jonas, to supply the tribute money to our Lord and S. Peter, to feed the King of kings. Therefore praise and bless the Lord who has favoured you among all creatures." The fishes, attentive to this pious exhortation, testified by divers movements and by their respectful attitude that they wished to pay the Lord the tribute of their mute homage. "Let us praise the Lord," said the saint, turning to the crowd; "let us praise the Lord, since senseless creatures hearken to His Word with more docility than men created to His image." At the sight of such a prodigy the heretics opened their eyes to the divine light, and that very evening returned to the bosom of the Catholic Church.

The saint's achievements were not less marvellous in Provence and Languedoc, whither the holy Patriarch had sent him to continue the work of S. Dominic and arrest the progress of the Manichean heresy. It was on this occasion that he merited to be called by the Sovereign Pontiffs, the Ark of the Testament and the indefatigable hammer of heretics.

The Most High Himself deigned to manifest by a miracle the love of predilection He bore to His two servants, Francis of Assisi and Anthony of Padua. At the Provincial Chapter held at Arles in Provence, in 1224, the young Portuguese preached with seraphic ardour on the title of the Cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." In the course of his sermon, S.

Francis appeared as if to give more weight to his disciple's teaching, and blessed the preacher and all the assembled brethren, who were inundated with consolation and renewed in the spirit of their vocation, which is all summed up in the love of Jesus crucified. Francis himself admitted to his confidants the reality of this apparition, which symbolised the close union that attached him to his brethren.

If the hidden cause of the marvels we have related be sought for, it will be found in the words of the Gospel: "But they going forth preached everywhere; the Lord working withal, and confirming the word with signs that followed." * It was the same with S. Anthony of Padua; he had offered to God his zeal, an immense, burning zeal, and God had granted him in return the gift of working miracles and teaching hearts.

The celebrated wonder-worker was early invited to the eternal nuptials. He died at Padua on Friday the 13th of June 1213, at the age of thirty-six, murmuring a hymn to Mary. Little children divulged the secret of his death, crying out in the streets, "The Father is dead! S. Anthony is dead!" Gregory IX. (Cardinal Ugolino) inscribed him in the calendar of saints during the solemnity of Pentecost, May 30, 1232. A few years afterwards, S. Bonaventure, then General of the Friars Minors, opened S. Anthony's tomb; the body was reduced to ashes, the tongue alone was intact, fresh and ruddy like that of a living man. The seraphic doctor took it in his hands, and, kissing it respectfully, exclaimed, "O blessed tongue, which has never ceased to praise God and taught others to bless Him, now we see clearly how precious thou art in the eyes of the Most High!" Then he handed it to the city magistrates, who received it on a golden plate.

* Mark xvi. 20.

Padua, like Assisi, is one of those places filled with a single thought, which live by a tradition, by a tomb. Antenor, its founder, Titus Livius, to whom it gave birth, are forgotten; the famous University has lost its antique splendour; but what has not grown old, what the city ever prides in, is the memory of S. Anthony, the privileged disciple of S. Francis. It is careful to apprise strangers of it, and on its walls we read the inscription, "*Gaude, felix Padua, quæ thesaurum possides*" (Rejoice, happy Padua, that possessest such a treasure). In 1532 the Republic of Padua built the colossal church that contains the saint's tomb; it is surmounted by seven cupolas and flanked with two slender campaniles. The saint's chapel is adorned with bas-reliefs in Carrara marble; the choir, high altar, and arches contain *chefs d'œuvre* by the greatest masters; thirty-six silver lamps, the offerings of kings and princes, continue burning before the saint's altar.*

Thus the second efflorescence of S. Francis's disciples is still more brilliant than the first. Bernard, Daniel, Anthony of Padua—what men, what glorious names! They bear two new crowns to the Order, that of martyrdom and of the apostolate. In retracing—God knows with what delight!—their beautiful lives and their beautiful deaths, we believe we have not wandered from our subject; for it was from the blessed Patriarch they received their mission and their authority, it is to him they owe their triumph; and, moreover, in the religious as in the human family, the glory of the sons casts a brilliant and immortal reflection on their father's brow.

* He is represented sometimes holding the Blessed Sacrament, with a mule kneeling before him; sometimes holding the infant Jesus in his arms, or with a lily in his hand, or calmly passing by an impious crowd who are throwing stones at him.

CHAPTER XI.

S. FRANCIS RETURNS TO ITALY—THE WOLF OF GUBBIO —THIRD CHAPTER-GENERAL — BROTHER ELIAS — JOHN OF STRACHIA.

(*1220–1221.*)

WHILE S. Francis was traversing Palestine and Syria, Friar Stephen was hastening from Italy to warn him that the famous Brother Elias was striving, if not to destroy the Order, at least to modify it by vexatious innovations. The holy founder speedily returned; but, whatever progress the mischief may have made, waited for the approaching Chapter-General to be held at Portiuncula on the Feast of S. Michael, doubtless to apply a more efficacious remedy. Meanwhile he resolved to visit the convent of Bologna, founded eight years before by his first disciple, Bernard of Quintavalle, evangelising on the way most of the cities of Lombardy—Padua, Bergamo, Brescia, Mantua, and Cremona—where, as was his wont, he restored peace, and left new convents of his Order behind him.

At Cremona he met S. Dominic. It was one of the most delightful consolations Providence vouchsafed the two Patriarchs, who were enabled to confer on the goodness of God, the flourishing state of their Orders, and the movement that was drawing whole populations after the Master whom they served. A miracle terminated this saintly converse, which took place in a convent of the Friars Minors. The religious begged them to bless the troubled waters

of an insalubrious well; and the two saints gazed at each other for some moments, the one waiting for the other to reply, until S. Dominic broke silence and said to the brethren, "Draw some water and bring it to us." The water was brought, and Dominic said to Francis, "Father, bless this water in the name of the Lord." "No," replied Francis, "bless it yourself, for you are the greater." This pious contention lasted some time; at length, vanquished by Francis's humility, Dominic made the sign of the cross over the vessel, and directed them to pour the water into the well, which was purified for ever.

From Cremona S. Francis directed his steps to learned Bologna. He had conceived a high opinion of the virtue of the Bolonese, since Bernard wrote to him in 1212, "Father, everything is going on well at Bologna. But send some other religious to take my place; for I dare not hope to do any good here. I am even greatly afraid of losing my soul, they heap such honours upon me!" But he was far from expecting the triumphal greeting of which he was going to be the recipient. The moment they heard of his coming the whole city went out to meet him. Students and professors, rich and poor, all wanted to see the saint, to hear him, to receive his blessing. They formed a loving retinue such as earthly kings and emperors never know; and it was with the greatest difficulty he reached the immense square opposite the Piccolo Palazzo, where he preached in a manner so sublime that they thought they heard a seraph rather than a man.

An original testimony of the impression his appearance and language produced is still preserved in the records

of the church of Spalatro. Here it is in all its simplicity: "I, Thomas, citizen of Spalatro and archdeacon of the cathedral church of the said city, being a student at Bologna in the year 1220, on the Feast of the Assumption of the Mother of God, heard S. Francis preach in the public square opposite the Piccolo Palazzo, where nearly the whole city were assembled. He divided his discourse thus: angels, men, and demons. He spoke of those intelligent beings with such eloquence and exactitude, that the lettered people who heard him were in admiration at such beautiful language in the mouth of such a simple man. He did not pursue the ordinary method of preachers; but, speaking after the fashion of popular orators, brought everything round to a single point, the extinction of enmities and the spirit of revenge, the restoration of peace and concord among the citizens. His habit was poor and coarse, his person mean, his face worn; but God gave such effect to his words that a great number of nobles, highly incensed against each other, and whose rage had already caused much bloodshed, were publicly reconciled. Affection and veneration for the saint were so universal and carried so far, that the crowd ran after him and thought themselves happy if they could only touch the hem of his habit."

These few lines from an eyewitness wonderfully depict the epoch of S. Francis and his prodigious influence over it. It was the age of Frederick II. and the ferocious Ezzelino, the age that was to witness the execution of Ugolino of Pisa and the Sicilian Vespers. Political dissensions, armed conflicts, feuds between one family and another or one city and another, — such was the gaping wound of which

Europe, and Italy in particular, was dying, and which all the resources of human skill were powerless to cure. Then intervened the supernatural Providence of God the Saviour, who selected a man as the instrument of His infinite mercy, invested him with an evidently superhuman mission, and made him the arm of His own omnipotence; and the peoples stood mute before him. Such, in a few words, was the rôle of the seraphic Francis. He appeared, and at the sole sight of his face, furrowed by penance, the hardest hearts were softened. He preached peace, peace to all men, and diffused it around him as the olive diffuses its oil, the sun its rays, and the flower its perfume. Passions were stilled, hatreds appeased, the inseparable love of God and man born anew in hearts, and peace, that first need of peoples, copiously transfused into the very veins of society.

The majority of the Bolonese returned to the practice of the Christian faith, and several assumed the penitential habit, among the rest Nicolo Pepoli, donor of the convent of that city, Bonizo, and two young students, Pellegrino and Rigero of Modena. Francis performed several miracles, restored sight to a child by making the sign of the cross over him, and cured another of epilepsy by having a piece of parchment, on which he had written a prayer, applied to his chest. Both subsequently entered the Order.

Francis, after paying his respects to Cardinal Ugolino, then legate in Lombardy, repaired to the convent of the Holy Cross, occupied by the Friars Minors. What was his surprise when he found himself in presence of an imposing edifice! His dissatisfaction was increased when he learned that John of Strachia, Provincial of Bologna, had opened a course of lectures in theology

and rhetoric without consulting him. Indignant at this double infringement of regular discipline, he severely reprimanded him. "What!" he cried, "is this the abode of the evangelical poor! Friars Minors lodge in this palace! For my part, I do not recognise this house as one of ours, and I shall not regard those who occupy it as my brethren. For that reason I command you, in the name of obedience, to quit it as soon as possible." The religious obeyed without uttering a word; the very invalids themselves, including the angelic Brother Leo, the narrator of this occurrence, were transferred to some other place. But Cardinal Ugolino, dropping in peradventure, succeeded in appeasing the saint's anger, saying, "My son, have no scruple about accepting this house; the sick brothers need more air and space; and, as to ownership, it belongs to the donor and the holy Roman Church." It was a wise counsel; Francis followed it, and, conquering his repugnance, forgave the repentant violaters of the Rule, and allowed them to remain in the monastery. Nevertheless, he would not pass a night in it, and went to snatch a little repose in the convent of the Friars Preachers, in order that the lesson might have its effect. "An indulgence that favoured crime," said he, "would not be indulgence but complicity. I will not authorise by my presence the fault committed against holy poverty." As to the theological school, he shut it up, and formally forbade the Provincial to re-open it without his permission.

The next day, having bade farewell to his friend, S. Dominic, whom he was never again to see in this world, he retraced the road to Assisi, to preside over the Chapter-General. Here, properly speaking, ends

the Patriarch's apostolic life; he will hardly ever leave the convent again, on account of his numerous infirmities; and the few years he has yet to pass in this world's exile will be divided between contemplation, suffering, and the needs of his Order. Now, it seems to us, that we cannot better conclude the record of his preaching, than in placing under our readers' eyes the simple story of the wolf of Gubbio, a true story, which depicts to the life the manners of the epoch and the sympathetic goodness of the wonder-working saint.*

Gubbio, a small Umbrian town, situated to the north of Assisi on the steep incline of the Apennines, at the entrance of the rocky gorge leading to the Collo del Monte Calvo, was terrified by a wolf of monstrous size and ferocity, which not only attacked animals but devoured men and children. The inhabitants were in a state of consternation: the boldest dared not venture unarmed outside the walls. The saint, moved to compassion, went in search of the wolf. He ascended the mountain fearlessly, putting all his confidence in God; and, followed at a distance by the anxious multitude, advanced to the wolf's den. Disturbed out of his sleep, the ferocious beast, with gaping mouth, made a bound at Francis. The man of God goes up to him, makes the sign of the cross, and, calling him, says in a ringing voice, "Come here, brother wolf; come, I order you in the name of Christ; do me no harm, neither me nor any one." The wolf immediately stops, closes his mouth, and crouches like a gentle lamb at the saint's feet. "Brother wolf," pursues Francis, "you have committed great crimes. You

* The *Fioretti* (Bartolomeo of Pisa and Mariana of Florence) is only a literal reproduction of Bernard of Besse who tells this story as a real fact, and not as a purely imaginary legend.

have not only killed animals, you have been so cruel as to devour men made to the image of God. You deserve to die! Every one complains of you, and you are an object of horror to all the inhabitants of the country. But it is my wish, brother wolf, that you should sign a treaty of peace with them. I know hunger is the sole cause of your crimes; promise me, therefore, to lead an innocent life, and, on their part, the inhabitants will forgive you the past and henceforward provide for your subsistence. Do you consent?" And the wolf, bowing down his head, intimates his acceptance of the contract.

Then Francis retraced his steps towards the town along with the wolf, who followed him as a dog follows his master. And the whole population, having run out into the roadway to see such a strange sight, Francis, mounting a stone, thus harangued the crowd: "Brethren, it was in punishment of your sins the Lord permitted this scourge. But, think of it, if the jaws of a poor animal, who, after all, can only kill the body, are enough to terrify your town and the whole surrounding country, how much more should you dread that abyss of hell which is perpetually devouring its victims! Ah! be converted, do penance, and then God will deliver you not only from the rage of the wolf in this life but from the eternal flames after your death." After this discourse the saint solemnly asked the magistrates and inhabitants if they accepted the conditions of the treaty of peace with the wolf, that is to say, the promise on their part to feed him and on his part not to injure any creature. They all unanimously accepted them; and the wolf, to attest and ratify his engagement, put his paw into Francis's hand. At this their admiration was unbounded; enthusiastic

acclamations, wide-resounding like the sea-waves, broke from the surging crowd, who slowly dispersed, praising and blessing God for having sent them Francis, who, by his merits, had delivered them from the jaws of such a cruel beast. The wolf lived for two years after at Gubbio, going familiarly from door to door, entering the houses, without doing or receiving any injury; every one was eager to supply him with what was necessary for his subsistence; and when he went through the town the dogs never barked at him. At length "brother wolf" died of old age, deeply regretted by the inhabitants; for the very sight of that animal, traversing the streets as meek as a lamb, reminded them of the miracle and of the sanctity of the amiable Francis of Assisi.*

Thus we have seen the great Patriarch of the Friars Minors, drawing all the people after him, subduing the ferocity of the beasts and the fury of men, breathing nothing but a horror of bloodshed and a love of peace. It is not surprising that his voice should have moved the wolf of the Apennines, after it had disarmed Italian vengeance which is unforgiving.

Finally, after more than a year's absence, the holy founder returned to his dear convent of Our Lady of Angels shortly before the Feast of S. Michael. His presence was necessary, and his return eagerly awaited by his twelve first companions.

Friar Elias has availed of his title of Vicar-General to pose as a reformer. Able theologian, a man of a superior mind and of incredible energy, but an unquiet spirit, vain, and concealing under the humble habit an indomitable pride, he had, by a strange contrast, prescribed perpetual abstinence and intro-

* Bernard of Besse, *Chronicle.*

duced luxury in dress. When the saint made his solemn entry into Portiuncula, Brother Elias came to meet him along with the other religious, but it was easy to single him out by his dress. He wore a habit of finer material, a larger capuche, broader sleeves, and his gait was proud and haughty. Francis, guided by that Gospel counsel not to break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax, tried to move him by ridiculing his vanity. "Brother Elias," said he one evening in presence of the brethren, "lend me your habit." Not daring to refuse, Elias takes off his beautiful habit and brings it to the Father, who puts it on over his old habit, gracefully adjusting the folds, and walking round the room with head erect, chest distended, arms akimbo, saying, with a patronising air, "God have you in His keeping, my good people." Then, indignantly divesting himself of it, flinging it away from him, and turning to Elias, he says, "That is how the bastard Friars of our Order walk!" Then he resumes his habitual expression, his simple and modest gait, takes a few steps before the brethren, and says, "That is how the real Friars Minors walk." Brother Elias was covered with confusion, but not sincerely converted.

As to the probibition to eat meal, Francis withdrew it a short time after, on account of the following miracle:—While he was in contemplation in the wood adjoining Portiuncula, a young traveller, of extraordinary beauty, knocked at the convent door, and asked for Brother Elias, who refused to come down. Masseo, who then filled the office of porter, did not know how to carry such a disagreeable answer to the young stranger. "I know everything," said he, smiling; "go and tell Father Francis to direct him to come and speak to me." Masseo ran into the wood, where he

found the man of God rapt in ecstasy, his arms upturned towards heaven. "Tell Brother Elias," said the Father without changing his position, "that I command him to go and speak to that young man." Elias had to obey, and went down to the parlour, murmuring. "I come to ask you," said the stranger gently, "if men who profess to observe the holy Gospel, should or should not practise that counsel, 'Eat whatsoever is put before you'?" "Go your way," replied Elias; "I have no answer to make you." And, in his vexation, he rudely shut the door in his face. But soon, recognising his fault, he returned to excuse himself: there was no one there. Francis, having learned from our Lord that this young man was an angel, deservedly reproached Brother Elias with his unbecoming conduct. "My son," said he, "is it thus you receive angels' visits? I am very much afraid your pride will render you unworthy to remain in our humble institute."* Thereupon he bowed him out.

The year following he repeated the same menances, but in the form of a distinct and positive prophecy. Here is how S. Antoninus relates the circumstance. Francis carefully avoided meeting, seeing, or speaking to Brother Elias. Elias, having remarked it and suspecting some mystery, went to look for the saint, and, as the latter was trying to get away, detained him by the skirt of his habit, saying in a voice of emotion, "Father, why do you fly away from me like that? Speak, I beg." "I shall conceal nothing from thee, my son," replied the saint. "Here is what our Lord revealed to me. Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting. Thou wilt violate thy vows; by reason of thy iniquities, thou wilt die outside the

* Bernard of Besse.

Order, and thou wilt be damned!" "God!" cried Brother Elias, "what a sad perspective! Yet that should be no motive for you to banish me from your presence; run rather after the lost sheep, and bring him back on your shoulders like the Good Shepherd. Pray for me that I may not be accursed of God; for it is written that the Most High changes His decrees when the sinner corrects his faults." Brother Elias was on his knees, his glance was supplicating, and his words broken with sighs, tears, and sobs.

Francis, who loved him, promised to intercede in his favour. He retired into the deepest solitude to hold converse with Heaven alone; and, after three days of prayers and austerities, returned and said, "My son, the Lord has revoked the sentence of reprobation His justice had pronounced against thee. So thy soul will escape the torments of hell, but, in punishment of thy pride, thou shalt die out of the Order." Events justified the truth of this prediction.

Deposed first by Gregory IX. in 1230, on the accusation of such men as Bernard of Quintavalle and S. Anthony of Padua; re-elected Minister-General in 1236, and again deposed by the same Sovereign Pontiff in 1239 for his violence and crying injustice (particularly against Cæsar of Spires), Friar Elias of Cortona went to conceal his vexation in his native city, where he got mixed up in intrigues, joined the party of the Emperor Frederick II., then at open war with the Holy See, threw off the habit of his Order in 1244, and was excommunicated by Innocent IV. Sickness stopped him in his criminal career; he entreated forgiveness, and, thanks to the prayers and merits of his Blessed Father, had time to get the sentence of excommunication fulminated against him

raised, and receive from a faithful child of S. Francis the absolution of his faults (1253). Happy had he been if he walked in the footsteps of the holy founder!

Elias is one of those impassioned natures upon whom it is difficult to form an accurate judgment. The old chroniclers of the Order, giving more prominence to his faults than his qualities, have branded his memory; some modern authors, relying upon certain very eulogistic passages in S. Antoninus, have striven to rehabilitate him. Let us be permitted, then, to give our opinion; we shall do it with all the impartiality history requires.

Partisans and adversaries alike recognise in him much talent, learning, and eloquence, indomitable energy of character, as well as an invaluable faculty for government. We therefore infer that he had received from on high a providential mission—that of organising, in succession to the saint, the work of the Seraphic Patriarch. His genius was marvellously adapted to this mission; had he accomplished it, he would have shone with incomparable *éclat* in the constellation of the great men of the Order, between S. Francis and S. Bonaventure. But he needed to be a saint. Unfaithful to his vocation, traitor to his most sacred oaths, he was rejected by God, censured by his brethren, and condemned by the Sovereign Pontiffs. Terrible lesson for those who listen to the demon of Pride and Ambition!

Still we shall shortly see our Lord Himself formally designate Brother Elias to the choice of our saint. Let no one be astonished. Without wishing to scrutinise the designs of the Eternal, it seems to us that He thereby intended to prove to all ages, that in

the Seraphic Order, as in all other religious Orders, God has need of no one, and can, if it pleases Him, despite the unworthiness of a few superiors and the world's malice, maintain the work He has created.

By a mysterious coincidence, at the very hour when Brother Elias was beginning to wander from the good way, a child who was to be substituted for him in his providential mission was born in Tuscany; and at the time of his apostasy (1244), Bonaventure (it was the child's name) was finishing his noviciate. Thus the designs of God are accomplished; His mercy pursues men, and their iniquities only serve to display the action of His Providence. Mixture of greatness and baseness, of learning and vanity, Friar Elias, to our thinking, is none the less one of the most remarkable personages of that epoch. We shall see him almost continually at the head of his brethren; the daughters of S. Clare will hold him in the highest esteem, and—more astonishing still!—Francis in his dying moments will give him a last and solemn benediction, gage of that which the Lord reserved for his last hour.

Now that we know his character and the quality of his genius, we will resume the course of events.

A few days before the Feast of S. Michael the saint had a supernatural vision, which made a deep impression upon him. He saw a colossal statue with a golden head, silver arms, brazen legs, and clay feet, and understood that these different metals signified the different ages of the Franciscan family and future laxities.* It was under the influence of these impressions and for the purpose of maintaining the Order in its primitive beauty, that he opened his third Chapter General at Our Lady of Angels on the 29th of Sep-

* Bernard of Besse.

tember 1220. He took two measures which at first sight appear rather severe, but were only just. He began by deposing the unworthy Brother Elias, and abrogated his decree upon perpetual abstinence. He went still further with John of Strachia, who, despite his formal prohibition, had had the audacity to re-open the course of theology at Bologna. Not content with divesting him of his charge as Provincial, knowing by a supernatural revelation the callousness of the culprit, he publicly cursed him. In vain the dejected religious begged him to withdraw the anathema. "I cannot bless him whom the Lord has cursed!" he replied. Heartrending to relate, the unhappy man persevered in his culpable resistance, and expired a short time after, uttering the cry of the despairing, "I am damned! I am accursed for all eternity!"

Francis, though of a gentle, amiable disposition, displayed inflexible firmness on these painful occasions. Was it not his right and duty to extirpate and to lop off from the vine-stock useless or noxious branches? Besides, after having done his duty as superior, his tender heart gave expression to the most fraternal feelings towards his religious, accompanied with wise counsels as to the study of science and preaching. "My dear children," said he, "there is nothing more excellent than the ministry of the Divine Word; preachers are entitled to all our respect and gratitude; for they are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and the adversaries of the demon. Honour, therefore, to those who relish and cause to be relished by others the eternal truths! They shall receive the reward of their labours from the Sovereign Judge. But woe to those who only seek their own interests, are intoxicated with success, or lose in sterile studies the time they

should employ in the acquisition of virtue! On the great day when all will be revealed, they will have nothing in their hands but sheafs of confusion, shame, and sorrow. God prefers a simple lay brother who lives holily; He will glorify him, while He will condemn the others, according to that oracle of the Old Testament, 'The barren hath borne many; and she that had many children is weakened.' * The barren woman is the image of that humble Friar, who received no mission to teach, and yet who will find himself the father of thousands of souls saved by his prayers. She who had a numerous posterity is the figure of the fine speakers who think they have begotten a multitude of souls to Jesus Christ, and who will recognise on the last day that they do not belong to them. Remember, then, I want men of prayer rather than learned men. Do not leave prayer for study without a motive, nor give yourselves up to study through pure curiosity; but study to know how to live best, and teach others by your example the way to virtue. In a word, be true disciples of the Gospel; draw from meditation what you should teach in public, and the divine fire that should animate you; strive, above all, to practise obedience and humility; do not rely upon your exalted dignity, and be on your guard against Satan's wiles, for who can count the victims he has already made? He first raised the standard of revolt and drew down with him the third of the heavenly spirits; he drove Adam and Eve and all their posterity out of the terrestrial Paradise; he asked to sift the apostles as they sift wheat, and you know how he has succeeded! One of them betrayed his Master, the other denied Him, all abandoned Him. Watch and

* 1 Kings ii. 5.

pray, therefore, that you may not decline from the sanctity of your vocation." *

In the first capitulary session the servant of God told his brethren, "Henceforth I am dead to you. Here is your superior, Peter of Catana; it is him we should all obey, you and I." And, prostrating himself at Peter of Catana's feet, he promised him respect and obedience in all things, as Minister-General of the Order. Then, still kneeling, his hands clasped and his eyes upturned to heaven, bathed in tears, he uttered this prayer with an indescribable accent of love: "Lord Jesus Christ, I commend to You this family who belongs to You, and whom until now You have confided to me. You know my infirmities render me incapable of governing; I leave them, then, in the hands of the Minister-General. If it happens, through their negligence, scandals, or excessive rigour, any one of the Friars Minors perishes, they shall render an account to You, Lord, on the day of judgment." He came to this determination, not only on account of his strong attraction to the hidden life, but also on account of his ever-increasing infirmities. His voice was so weak that they could hardly hear him. Nevertheless, the religious received his resignation with some reservation; it was agreed that, while remaining subject to his guardian, he should always retain the rights and title of Minister-General, and his successors during his life he only called Vicars-General. It was not long before be was obliged to intervene in the affairs of the Order. Peter of Catana, a man of a very gentle disposition, finding the weight of government too heavy for his shoulders, resigned at the Chapter held at Pentecost the year following (1221); and Francis, upon the

* Works of S. Francis of Assisi.—*Mark of Lisbon.*

formal order of God, reinvested the famous Brother Elias with the charge of Vicar-General.

Cæsar of Spires, who had taught theology before he was a Friar Minor, and who dreaded the ideas and innovations of Elias, had an interview with the Blessed Father, and a long conversation with him on the state of his soul and the different points of the Rule. "Father," said he before retiring, "I have taken the firm resolution of strictly observing to my last breath, by God's grace, the holy Gospel and our Rule. But I have a favour to ask you; I shall speak in all simplicity. If it happens that any of the religious transgress the Rule, give me now your blessing, that I may separate from them and join the faithful religious." At these words Francis joyfully embraced him, gave him his blessing, and, laying his hand upon his head, said, "Know, my son, that thy prayer is heard: thou art a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedech."

CHAPTER XII.

The Third Order: its Object and its Destiny.

(*1221.*)

Twelve years had hardly elapsed since the foundation of the Seraphic Order, and already the Friars Minors had convents in Italy, Spain, France, Germany, and even Palestine: the blessing of Heaven had given them grace to increase and multiply everywhere. The Second Order, the Order of Clarisses, though three years younger, was not less flourishing than its predecessor.

The example, preaching, and miracles of S. Francis had moved Europe and inspired a universal attraction towards the cloister, and from every rank of life came generous souls who took refuge under the banner of the Patriarch of Assisi or his glorious daughter, S. Clare. Clerics and laity, whom sacred engagements or the obligations of their state in life retained in the world, were grieved they could not follow the general movement that was drawing people towards solitude. Many, weary of those days of corruption and anarchy, came to consult the saint and ask him for a rule of life drawn up by his own hand, in order to walk more securely in the ways of Christian perfection. S. Francis promised to compose a rule for them that would allay their fears, help them to avoid the perils of the age, and, without quitting the world, taste the repose of the religious life. He kept his word, and it was for them he instituted his Third Order, of which we are going to briefly narrate the origin and progress.

This work, like all Francis's, or rather all God's works, was born in silence and obscurity. Passing through Poggi-Bonzi in Tuscany, on his way from Florence to Sienna, the saint met one of his old friends, the merchant Luchesio. For some months he was no longer recognisable as the hard, avaricious man he had been, and was edifying by his liberal almsgiving those whom his selfishness had scandalised. They saw him helping the needy, caring the sick in the hospitals, keeping open house for pilgrims, and defending the rights of the Holy See. In his zealous ardour he tried, but in vain, to inspire his wife, Bona Donna, with the same sentiments. A pious woman, but hearkening too much to the prudence of the flesh, she was one of those mothers of families who are always

afraid they will not have ground enough to stand on, and therefore sharply censured her husband for his prodigality. A miracle converted her. One day Luchesio, after giving away all the bread that was in the house, still begged her to give something to the poor people who were coming to the door, when she angrily replied, "Brainless, weak-headed man, you are always neglecting the interests of your family!" Luchesio, as patient as he was charitable, unmoved by this insult, again begged her to open the cupboard where the bread was kept, all the while earnestly invoking Him who in the desert had fed more than five thousand persons with five loaves and two fishes. Bona Donna at length obeyed, and, to her great surprise, found a large quantity of loaves. From that day forward she no longer needed to be exhorted to works of mercy, and there was a pious emulation in exercise of charity. Such was the house that was to be the cradle of the Third Order of Penitence. "You have asked me," said Francis, "to draw out a way of perfection suited to your state. To meet your wishes I have thought of instituting a Third Order in which married persons could serve God perfectly; and I think you cannot do better than be its first-fruits." They joyfully accepted this proposition, and begged the saint to admit them into this new institute. He gave them a simple, modest, ashen-grey habit like the Friars Minors', and initiated into this form of life several persons in Poggi-Bonzi and Florence. The Third Order of Penitence, the oldest of all the Third Orders, was thus instituted in 1221. It was the grain of mustard seed that was soon to become a large tree and shelter the birds of heaven. A few months after the saint drew up a tertiary Rule, broad and simple in its legis-

lation and adapted to every social position without distinction of time or nationality, the object being to help souls whom imperative duties constrain to live in the world, to awaken or revive the spirit of Christianity, and enable them to participate in the virtues as well as the advantages of the religious life.

All who profess the Catholic faith, and a filial submission to the Holy See, may be admitted into the Third Order. Nevertheless, four conditions are required:—(1) to restore unjustly-acquired goods; (2) to be frankly reconciled with one's neighbour; (3) to observe the commandments of God and the Church, and in addition whatever is prescribed by the Rule; (4) married women to have the express permission of their husbands. The Rule does not oblige under pain of even venial sin, having no other moving-spirit or sanction than love and goodwill.

Francis properly begins by setting in order that little interior kingdom called the human heart; for, how compose a perfect society with bad and incongruous elements? He then addresses himself to family duties, and the prayers and penances which constitute the essence of the Third Order. The brethren and sisters must make their wills within three months after their definitive admission; daily recite the Office of the Blessed Virgin or of the Paters;* fast every Friday, the whole of Advent and Lent; dress simply according to the requirements of their social position; and give up theatres and pleasure parties. By these laws the holy founder destroyed the cankerworm of all society—the passion for dress and the love of pleasure. He also forbids, by a special article, oaths, wrangling, and lawsuits; and, wishing to establish peace at any price, strikes

* Fifty-four *Paters* and *Glorias*.

a decisive blow in this last clause: "The brethren shall carry no offensive arms, unless in defence of the Roman Church, the Catholic faith, and their country." In a word, he puts an end to unjust wars, the thirst of personal vengeance, duels, and quarrels; and, directing minds towards an imperishable good—the right—teaches them to blend in one and the same love the Church and Fatherland, the heavenly and the terrestrial country, that in which they are begotten to God and that in which they are begotten to the world. They deserve the name of traitors if they follow a flag whereon are not inscribed these two sacred names, God and Fatherland!

This rapid *coup d'œil* of the Rule of the Third Order does not sufficiently reveal its profound influence; the most one could say is, "It was a stroke of genius for those unhappy times." But what strokes of genius have remained dead letters! It is the Church that gives life and duration, strength and fecundity, to works; it was the Church that, taking the Third Order under its lofty protection, gave it that stability which purely human institutions cannot attain. Pope Honorius III. verbally approved the Rule of the Third Order (1221), as Innocent III. had approved that of the Friars Minors. Gregory IX., in a letter dated June 2d, 1230, defended the Tertiaries and renewed the exemptions and privileges accorded by his predecessor. Finally, Nicholas IV. solemnly confirmed the Rule by a pontifical bull (1289). Five years after Benedict XIII. sums up and ratifies in these terms the invaluable favours the Holy See had lavished on the Third Order:—

"After having maturely reflected on what the exact observers of this Order have done and can do in future,

if they wish with the help of the Lord, for the good of the Catholic religion and the reformation of morals, by their examples of abnegation and humility, We, desirous of providing superabundantly for the maintenance, increase, and tranquillity of the Brethren, of Our own motion, without any solicitation from the Brothers or Sisters, or any other person, but through a spontaneous sentiment of Our goodwill, with full knowledge of the cause, and through the esteem in which We hold their most lofty poverty, by the tenor of these present letters approve, confirm, and sanction in perpetuity this Rule of the Third Order, approved and confirmed in due form by the Roman Pontiffs Our predecessors of happy memory, namely:—Nicholas IV., for Tertiaries of both sexes living in the world, August 17, 1289; Clement V., August 30, 1308; Gregory XI., February 6, 1373; Leo X., for Tertiaries Regular, February 20, 1521."

At the same time S. Dominic founded a similar association in Lombardy, under the significant title of the Militia of Jesus Christ, which subsequently assumed the name of the Third Order of Penitence of S. Dominic, and was solemnly approved by Eugenius IV. (1439). The Third Order Secular, with which we are here concerned, is not an association, a congregation, or a confraternity; it is a permanent spiritual society associated to the two first Orders of S. Francis, and a real Order, although the three vows essential to the religious state, properly so called, poverty, obedience, and chastity, are not found therein. The Sovereign Pontiffs have thus defined it:—"Following in the footsteps of our predecessors who have approved, confirmed, and bestowed the greatest praise on this form of life," writes Benedict XIII., "We decree and declare

that the Third Order has always been, and still remains, holy, meritorious, and conformable to Christian perfection; and, moreover, that it is really and in the fullest sense of the word an Order uniting seculars scattered all over the whole world, since it has its proper Rule, approved by the Holy See, its noviciate, its profession, and a habit of determinate form and material." *

It is the third Order instituted by the Patriarch of Assisi, or rather the third branch of a single Order, containing in its plenitude men and women, the cloister and the world. By the creation of the Friars Minors, Francis had brought the monastic phalanxes out of the desert to arm them with the sword of the Divine Word; by that of the Poor Ladies, he caused the virtues of the Marthas, the Agneses, the Cecilias, and numerous other virgins, whom astonished Paganism had greeted as terrestrial angels, to reflourish; and, finally, by the Third Order he strove to introduce the religious life even into the domestic fireside and by the nuptial bedside. It was a novel conception; still it answered so well to the needs of the time that it was received with indescribable enthusiasm. The world was peopled with young girls, widows, married couples, and men of every rank, who publicly wore the livery of penitence, and subjected themselves in the privacy of their own houses to the practices of the monastic life. The spirit of association that reigned in the Middle Ages, and which is the true spirit of Christianity, favoured this movement. Just as one belonged to a family by blood, to a corporation by the office one filled, to a people by the soil, to the Church by baptism, they wished to belong by self-devotion to one of the two glorious militias that served Jesus Christ in apos-

* Bull *Paterna Sedis Apostolicæ.*

tolic and penitential works. "They put on the livery of S. Dominic or S. Francis; they were engrafted on one of those two trunks and nourished by their sap, while still preserving their individuality; they frequented their churches, participated in their prayers, cultivated friendly relations with them, and followed as close as possible in the track of their virtues. It was no longer thought necessary to fly from the world to imitate the saints: every room might become a cell and every house a Thebaïd."*

The Third Order Seraphic had just sprung into existence, and already the popular voice, echoing the voice of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, proclaimed that it was the work of the Most High, and the sweetest fruit of S. Francis's zeal. Its history, in its religious and social relationship, assuredly forms one of the finest pages of the Middle Ages; it was propagated with the same rapidity as its two predecessors, traversed mountains and seas, reached even to the extremities of the Chinese empire, and, renewing the face of the earth, powerfully contributed to make the thirteenth century the Christian century *par excellence.* Subsequently it was introduced into the New World, along with the first Franciscans who accompanied Christopher Columbus. In fine, from its origin down to our time it has never ceased to produce in every clime and in every class of life an admirable efflorescence of saints to such an extent that the desert and the cloister might be jealous. Unable to enumerate all the eminent and holy personages who have rendered it illustrious, we shall content ourselves with citing the principal.

The first of the Tertiaries, following the chronological order, is that Luchesio whose conversion we have

* Lacordaire's *Life of S. Dominic.*

related. From the day he was enrolled in the spiritual militia of penitence, he strove more and more to walk in the footsteps of his blessed Father, and passed the rest of his days in tears of compunction, in good works, and caring the poor and sick. In return the Lord gave him the gift of miracles and ecstatic prayer. The incident we are going to relate will show us his character and virtue better than a long discourse. One day as he was carrying a cripple on his shoulders, a young voluptuary, obstructing him, said mockingly, "What the devil are you carrying on your shoulders?" "It is not the devil I am carrying," replied Luchesio; "it is Jesus, He who said, 'Whatsoever you shall do to the least of My brethren, you have done it unto Me.'" A sublime response which Heaven ratified on the spot by a miracle! The young blasphemer, in punishment of his fault, was stricken dumb. Thoroughly contrite, he had recourse to the prayers of him whom he had offended, who forgivingly interceded for him, obtained his immediate cure, and dismissed him with these comforting words, "Go in peace, my son; but in future beware of insulting God by thy tongue or thy works." Bona Donna, seeing her husband at the point of death, begged him to entreat that they might be reunited in the rewards of their heavenly country, as they had been in the labours and sufferings of exile. This favour was granted; after which Luchesio gently slept in the kiss of the Lord, murmuring this prayer, "I return thanks to the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for having delivered me from the snares of the demon by the merits of the Passion of Jesus Christ." It was the 28th of April, probably in the year 1232.*

If Luchesio is the first tertiary, Louis IX., king of

* Luchesio was beatified by Pius VI.

France, is without contradiction the most celebrated—Louis IX., who was at once the greatest captain, the greatest prince, and one of the greatest saints of the thirteenth century; Louis IX., who, after the defeat of Mansourah, commanded the respect and admiration even of his barbarian conquerors, died faithful to his noble devise, "God, France, and Margaret," and merited to become the patron of the brethren of the Third Order of S. Francis.*

Let us also cite, among the Sovereign Pontiffs, Gregory IX., Innocent XII., Pius IX., and His Holiness Leo XIII. now reigning; among crowned heads, Michael Paleologus, Rodolph of Hapsburg, Louis VIII. father of S. Louis; S. Ferdinand, king of Castile; Charles V., Philip II., and Philip III., kings of Spain; Bela IV., king of Hungary; Jagellon, king of Poland; John, king of Arragon; Charles IV., king of Bohemia; Charles II. and Robert, kings of Sicily and Jerusalem; Amedeus VII., duke of Savoy; among the clergy, regular or secular, S. Ives, S. Roch of Montpellier, S. Francis of Paula, S. Ignatius of Loyola, S. Vincent de Paul, M. Olier, Cardinal de Berulle, and, in our own time, the Curé of Ars. They all gloried in wearing the Franciscan livery, as Cardinal Trejo so well expresses it in the letter he wrote in 1623 to the illustrious Father Wadding. "You praise me," said he, "for wearing the grey habit and coarse cord of your illustrious founder over the Roman purple; I do not deserve such praise. If this garment appears mean, I have the greater need of it, since, raised to a higher degree of honour in the Church, I ought to humiliate myself more to avoid pride. But is not the habit of S. Francis a real purple fit to enhance the dignity of kings

* Wadding.

and cardinals? Yes, it is truly a purple dyed in the blood of Jesus Christ, and in the blood that issued from the stigmatas of His servant; it invests with royal dignity all those who wear it. What have I done, then, putting on this holy habit? I have joined purple to purple, the purple of royalty to the purple of the Cardinalate. Thus, far from having humiliated myself, I have reason to fear I have done myself too much honour and glorified myself more than I ought."

Science and poetry in turn bent their bows, not less noble than those of kings, before our saint's humility. Let us greet, in passing, the learned Raymond Lulli, who in 1315 obtained the crown of martyrdom; Michael Angelo and Raphael, princes of sculpture and painting; Christopher Columbus, the discoverer of the New World; the prince of Italian poets, Dante, who has engraved in immortal verse the portrait of that admirable pastor "whose life would be better sung amid the glories of heaven;" * and Lope de Vega, the Spanish satirical poet. Those great men desired to be buried in the habit of the Third Order, persuaded, not without reason, that God's judgment would be gentler if they presented themselves before Him in the livery of humility, and that the thunderbolt that spares not the laurels of the artist or poet would respect the pauper's dress.

But the Third Order nowhere excited more enthusiasm than among women. Too often chained from youth to a yoke for which they had no liking, seeing all their illusions fade away one by one, they turned to S. Francis, and under the penitential habit tasted the peace and happiness they had vainly sought from the world. The convent came to them, since they could

* La Divina Commedia: Paradiso, Canto xi.

not go to it; and, setting up in some corner of the paternal or conjugal dwelling a mysterious sanctuary filled by the invisible Spouse whom alone they loved, they freely poured out in His presence that gushing affection of which the Christian woman's heart is the inexhaustible reservoir. The Third Order realised their most ideal aspirations, and compensated for the servitude of their position; in return, they enriched it with the treasure of their virtues, their self-devotion, and their sanctity. The reader will thank us for placing under his eyes some of those perfumed flowers first planted in the seraphic parterre, and which will for ever be its fairest adornment.

Who has not heard of S. Elizabeth of Hungary, the sister and emulator of the Patriarch of Assisi, like him the friend of the poor before being the lover of poverty? Who has not read a hundred times the admirable pages the Count de Montalembert has consecrated to her, and from which we are going to give some extracts, beginning with the miracle of the roses? One winter's day she was going along a very steep road, accompanied by one of her attendants, and carrying in the folds of her royal mantle bread, eggs, and meat to distribute to the needy. Suddenly she is confronted by her husband, Louis of Thuringia, returning from the chase. Surprised to see her bending under the weight of her burden, he says, smiling, "Let us see what you are carrying," at the same time opening, despite her, the mantle she was clasping to her breast, but only to see some white and red roses, the most beautiful he had ever beheld. Observing the princess's confusion, he wants to reassure her by his caresses, when another prodigy stops him: a luminous aureola in the form of a crown environs and protects the saint's head. Full of admira-

tion, he begs her to continue her route, and rides off to Wartbourg, taking with him one of those miraculous roses, which he kept all his life.

The young queen became the protectress and mother of the lepers, and was pleased to dress the most hideous wounds with her own hands. The better to follow her attraction to a more perfect life, she embraced the Third Order and received the habit from the hands of the Venerable Conrad, Guardian of Marbourg. God, who intended to raise her to the summit of sanctity, then visited her with the severest trials. Driven from her palace and stripped of all her possessions, after the death of her husband, the Landgrave Louis, she could hardly find room for herself and her children in an inn at Eisenach. The very people she had lavished gifts upon abandoned her. Fixing her gaze upon her crucifix, henceforth her only treasure, she drank to the dregs the bitter chalice of the world's injustice without murmuring or recrimination. Is it not written that the more one participates here below in the sufferings of Christ, the more one will participate in His glory on high?

One day as she was crossing a muddy stream, into which they had thrown some stones to help her to get over, she met on her way an old beggar woman whom she had formerly kept up by her alms; but, in place of making way for her, she rudely jostled the saint, so that she fell into the stagnant water, then, adding raillery to ingratitude, "Good enough for you!" said she. "You would not live like a duchess when you were one; there you are now, poor and stuck in the mud! It is not I who will pick you up!" Elizabeth, always mild and patient, rose as best she could and said, smiling, "This is for the gold and jewels I formerly wore!" And she went her way rejoicing, to clean her dress in

a neighbouring stream and her soul in the blood of the spotless Lamb. These acts of heroism were habitual with her. S. Francis, hearing of it, was greatly rejoiced, and could not refrain from publicly sounding the praises of his beloved daughter; he even sent her, at the request of Cardinal Ugolino, his poor mantle, which the young princess valued more than her royal robe, and in dying bequeathed it to one of her servants, saying, "Here, my girl, is the finest of my diamonds. I assure thee every time I wore it Jesus, my Beloved, inundated me with sweetness." Seraphic soul, already ripe for heaven (she was only twenty-four), Elizabeth fled to the eternal hills on the 19th of November 1231, five years after her blessed Father. Gregory IX. canonised her on the 26th of May 1235. She is the patroness of the sisters of the Third Order of which she was the first-fruits in Germany, and of which she remains the purest glory.

Let us group around S. Elizabeth some of the holy women who form her *cortége* in heaven—Pica, our saint's pious mother; the Blessed Humiliana Cerchi, the first Florentine tertiary, a fervent soul who only sighed for the martyr's palm; S. Rose of Viterbo, that angelic child who, ordered by the Blessed Virgin, assumed the habit of the Third Order at ten, preached penitence like the prophets, had the signal honour of being exiled by Frederick II., and was transported to heaven at eighteen, after predicting the emperor's fall and the approaching triumph of the Church; Blanche of Castile, S. Louis' mother, and all the royal family; S. Elizabeth of Portugal, called by her subjects the Lady of Peace and their country's mother; the Blessed Cunegunda of Poland, who preserved her virginity in marriage; and finally that young girl who may be

called the Magdalen of the Third Order, S. Margaret of Cortona, whose conversion and repentance belong to our history as one of the most remarkable results of the Franciscan institution.

Born under the glowing sky of Tuscany (1249), endowed with seductive beauty, an impetuous temperament, and a large heart, early deprived of her mother's wise counsels, free, portionless, and inexperienced, young Margaret abandoned herself to every worldly pleasure, and led a disorderly life with a cavalier of Monte Pulciano, of whom she had a son. God took pity on her and rescued her from the degradation in which she was plunged. The Count di Monte-Pulciano had gone on a journey for a few weeks, accompanied by a fine greyhound that never left him. Now, after a few days, the favourite greyhound returned alone, and made his way into Margaret's apartment, whining plaintively, licking his mistress's hands, pulling her by the dress, as if he would say, "Come with me." She followed him, filled with cruel forebodings. The dog leads her to a wood a short distance from the city, stops and redoubles his lugubrious cries opposite a heap of branches recently detached from their trunk. Margaret removes the branches and recognises her lover, cowardly assassinated, and already become the prey of worms! From that hour she entered into herself; and after having imitated the sinner of the Gospel in her iniquities, imitated her also in her conversion. Shedding tears like her—that blood of the soul, as S. Augustine calls them—at the Saviour's blessed feet, she merited the same pardon as the Magdalen. Driven from Alviano by her father and her stepmother, abandoned by every one except the God of mercy, she takes

refuge with her child in Cortona, where she receives on bended knees the habit of the Third Order of S. Francis, soon becomes a new model of penitent love, and, like Mary Magdalen, highly favoured by the Heavenly Spouse. Her son subsequently entered the Order of the Friars Minors, and was distinguished by a very holy and apostolic life. Margaret died in an ecstasy of love, the 22d of February 1297, and was canonised by Benedict XIII. Thus, thanks to the Third Order, the reformation of morals penetrated into the bosom of families. The Gospel diffused its good odour in the midst of the world, and the Spirit of God, after flourishing in the solitudes, bloomed on the highways. The thirteenth century was saved.

The Third Order achieved another result, merely transient and confined to Italy, but which none the less merits the admiration of ages. United to that of S. Dominic it defended the rights of the Holy See, and thwarted the impious projects of the Emperors of Germany. The minister of Frederick II. affirms it in a letter to his master: "The Friars Minors and Friars Preachers have risen up against us. They have publicly reproved our life and our enterprises; they have trampled on our rights and made nothing of us; and to entirely destroy our predominance and wean the people's affections from us, they have created two new fraternities, including men and women, into which everybody is rushing, so that there is hardly any one whose name is not registered therein." This avowal of an enemy of the Church is valuable; it throws great light on one of the most obscure historical points, and explains the definitive triumph of the Guelphs by means of the spirit of association enlisted in the service of faith and patriotism. The tertiaries derived from that

spirit of association powerful aid in resisting the oppression of the invaders, and bringing about the triumph of justice over brute force. Enrolled under the banner of the Holy See, they always proclaimed themselves its intrepid champions, S. Francis had so impregnated his three Orders with the spirit that animated him, spirit of obedience and devotion to the Vicar of Jesus Christ! We do not hesitate for a moment to proclaim, the Third Order of S. Francis rendered a double service to Italy: it preserved the Catholic faith, and guarded the national independence. For this double reason the Sovereign Pontiffs have never ceased to shower spiritual favours and privileges upon it.

After establishing the Third Order of Penitence at Bologna and several other Tuscan cities, Francis, obedient to the invisible Hand that was leading him, redescended the Apennines, hastening to revisit his beloved sanctuary of Portiuncula, although he was far from dreaming of the wonders God was preparing for him. We are going to relate those marvels, taking for guide our old chronicler, Bernard of Besse; but, before touching the threshold of that chapel, let us pause and reflect for an instant. The land we are treading is holy; let us then, like Moses, take the shoes from off our feet, that is to say, purify our hearts, elevate our minds, that we may be worthy to assist at the sublime and consoling spectacles we are going to witness.

CHAPTER XIII.

PORTIUNCULA INDULGENCE—FRANCIS RESUMES PREACHING—ALEXANDER OF HALES.

(*1221–1223.*)

IT was in the month of October 1221, on one of those cool autumn nights only found under the skies of Umbria: the holy Patriarch had retired to the depths of a grotto situated about fifty paces a little to the east of Portiuncula; he was holding his crucifix in his hands, a death's head lay at his feet. At a moment when, rapt in God, he was praying with seraphic ardour for the conversion of poor sinners, he heard as it were the voice of an angel saying, "To the chapel, Francis; to the chapel!" He rose at once and fled to S. Mary of Angels, where a marvellous sight met his gaze. Upon the altar, above the tabernacle, environed in supernatural light, was the Word Incarnate, the Ruler of rulers, resplendent in glory and radiant with a beauty indescribable; for in vain would we seek a term of comparison in this fallen world, where the beams of the beautiful are scattered, refracted, and tarnished, and where we never see them without some impure admixture. Let us simply say that His divine countenance had the perennial bloom of youth united to the gravity of mature age, that His glance, fixed upon Francis, was incomparably suave, and that His lips breathed immeasurable meekness. At His right was Mary, His most glorious Mother, and all round a multitude of heavenly spirits. The unspeakable luminous glow that filled the sanctuary did not dazzle the eyes like the brilliant sunlight; quite th(

contrary, calm as deep-flowing water and vivid as a pencil of light, it irresistibly attracted the gaze which seemed to bathe and repose therein with delight. Our saint, transported with joy, prostrated himself with his face to the ground and adored along with the angels. "Francis," said the Son of God, "I know the zeal with which thou and thy brethren labour for the salvation of souls. Ask of Me, in recompense, for them and the honour of My Name, whatever favour thou pleasest, and I will grant it to thee; for I have given thee to the world to be the light of peoples and the support of My Church." Emboldened by such goodness, the saint addressed to Him this confident supplication: "O thrice-holy God! since I have found favour in Your eyes, I, who am but dust and ashes and the most miserable of sinners, conjure You, with all the respect of which I am capable, to deign to grant to Your faithful flock this signal grace, that all who, contrite and having confessed, shall visit this church, may receive a plenary indulgence and pardon of all their sins." Then he continued, turning towards Mary, "I pray the Blessed Virgin, Your Mother, the Advocate of mankind, to plead my cause before You." Oh, admirable sight, which human language or the artist's pencil is incapable of reproducing! Mary intercedes, and Jesus, who can refuse His Mother nothing, directs towards her His loving gaze, which He immediately turns to His servant, saying, "Francis, what thou askest is great; but thou shalt obtain still greater favours. I grant thee the indulgence thou solicitest, but, nevertheless, on condition that it shall be confirmed and ratified by My Vicar, to whom alone I have given ample power to bind and loose." At these words, the vision vanished, and Jesus, followed by His

blessed Mother and the angelic court, returned to the inaccessible sanctuary of the august Trinity.

At daybreak Francis set out with Fra Masseo for Perugia, where Pope Honorius III. then was. "Most Holy Father," said he with his charming simplicity, "a few years ago I repaired a little church dedicated to the Mother of God in your dominions, and I beg Your Holiness to enrich it with a valuable indulgence without the obligation of almsgiving." "I consent," replied the Sovereign Pontiff; "but tell me for what number of years thou requirest this pardon?" "Holy Father, may it please Your Holiness to grant me souls not years." "Thou wishest for souls! and how?" "I desire, if Your Holiness pleases, that all those who, repentant and absolved, will enter the church of S. Mary of Angels, shall receive the plenary remission of their sins for this world and the next."* "Francis, what thou askest is great, and quite unusual at the court of Rome." "I do not ask it in my own name, Most Holy Father, but in the Name of Jesus Christ, who has sent me." Then the Sovereign Pontiff repeated thrice, "In the Name of the Lord, We are pleased that thou shouldst have this indulgence." Upon some cardinals remarking that such a favour would be prejudicial to the pilgrimages to Rome and Jerusalem, Honorius replied, "We cannot revoke what we have freely conceded; We can only determine its duration." Then, turning to Francis, he added, "It is Our will that this indulgence be available in perpetuity during the space of one natural day from the first Vespers until Vespers of the day following."

Francis thanked the Pope, bowed, and humbly

* That is to say, the entire remission of the temporal punishment due to sin.

retired. Honorius, seeing he was going away, called him back and said, smiling, "Simple man! where are you going, and what evidence have you of this indulgence?" "Holy Father, your word is enough; let Jesus Christ be the notary, the Blessed Virgin the charter, and the angels the witnesses. I require no other authentic document, and leave it to God to prove that this work comes from Him." After a reply of such sublime simplicity, he quitted Perugia with the blessing of the Sovereign Pontiff to return to S. Mary of Angels. Having stopped halfway at a lazar-house to take a little repose, he had a vision, and, on awakening, called Masseo and said, "Let us rejoice, brother; for I affirm the indulgence the Sovereign Pontiff has granted me is ratified in heaven."

However, the day of the Great Pardon was not yet fixed. The servant of God prayed and waited, full of confidence: his hope was not deceived. Two years after the first apparition, on a cold winter night (January 1223), Francis was praying in his little cell, backed by the chapel of S. Mary of Angels, and scourging his innocent body severely. The demon, who is always watching for an opportunity to ruin souls, drew nigh, in the form of an angel of light, and put this thought into his mind, "What is the use of thus wasting your youth in vigils, fasts, and prayers? Do you not know that sleep is the grand restorative of the body? Believe me, you should take care of your health in order that you may serve God longer." Francis, discovering the trick of Satan, rushes out of his cell, takes off his habit, and, urged by that thirst of immolation which is the sign of victory and the better half of love, rolls himself in snow and in a bush full of thorns and brambles, saying to his bleeding

body, "Better suffer these pains with Jesus Christ, than let thyself be caught in the perfidious caresses of the serpent!" He had hardly accomplished this heroic act when the whole landscape around undergoes a transformation. A dazzling light envelops him; the thorns reddened with his blood are instantaneously covered with white and red roses, symbols of his purity and charity; heavenly spirits fling a mantle whiter than snow—woven doubtless in the mysterious loom where the lilies of the valley are clothed—over his lacerated shoulders; and then, in gentle tones far exceeding in sweetness the most harmonious concords of this lower world, invite him to follow them: "Francis, hasten to the church, where the Saviour of men awaits thee with His blessed Mother." The saint plucks twenty-four of these miraculous roses, twelve white and as many red, and repairs to the chapel by what seems to him a path strewn with carpets of silken softness.

Jesus was there upon a throne of light, as in the first apparition; the Queen of Heaven at His right, and myriads of angels around them. Francis, after a profound adoration, laid the roses on the altar and offered them to our Lord by the hands of the Immaculate Virgin. "Francis," said the Son of God, "why dost thou not render My Mother the tribute of homage thou hast promised her?" Francis, understanding that reference was made to the souls whom the great indulgence of Portiuncula was to sanctify, replied with filial confidence, "O thrice-holy God, Sovereign Master of heaven and earth, and Saviour of mankind, deign, in Your infinite mercy and for the love of your glorious Mother, to fix the day of the plenary indulgence with which you have enriched this holy place." "It is My will that it be the day when I broke the bonds of Peter,

the prince of My apostles, from the first Vespers to the evening of the morrow." "But, Lord, how will men believe my words?" "Fear nought; go again to him who is My Vicar on earth, in order that he may promulgate this indulgence: My grace will do the rest." In this mysterious colloquy between the Creator and His creature, peace was restored to earth, the angelic choirs intoned a *Te Deum* in thanksgiving, and the vision disappeared.

The next day the saint, always docile to the orders of the Lord, set out for Rome, accompanied by the three Friars who had witnessed the prodigy, Peter of Catana, Bernard of Quintavalle, and Angelo of Rieti. He took with him six miraculous roses, three white and three red, in honour of the Blessed Trinity, related before the Pope in the Lateran palace, in simple words, his marvellous vision, and presented his miraculous bouquet as unquestionable evidence of his veracity. Honorius, gazing upon these flowers so beautiful, so fresh, so odoriferous (it was then the depth of winter), and admiring still more the sanctity of Francis, favourably received his request, fixed the indulgence for August 2, and directed the Bishops of Assisi, Perugia, Lodi, Foligno, Nocera, Spoleto, and Gubbio, to solemnly promulgate it on the eve of St. Peter ad Vincula, and to consecrate the church of Our Lady of Angels.

On the day indicated the seven prelates, as well as the blessed Patriarch, mounted a dais erected before the chapel. An immense panting and expectant crowd thronged the plain. The saint, after describing in moving and lucid language the origin and excellence of the Divine favour he had received, unfolded a paper he held in his hand and read these words: "I want to make you all go to Paradise. I announce to you a

plenary indulgence I have obtained from the Divine Goodness and from the very mouth of the Sovereign Pontiff. All you who have come here with contrite hearts, gone to confession and received absolution from a priest, will have the full remission of the punishment due to your sins; and it will be the same every year in perpetuity for all those who shall come with the same dispositions. I wished that it should last eight days, but I could not obtain it." On hearing the expression "in perpetuity," the bishops were troubled, and agreed to reduce the above-mentioned indulgence to ten years. Dom. Guido first spoke, but he could not refrain from proclaiming "in perpetuity." The same thing occurred to the six other prelates, who recognised in this circumstance the merciful will of God.*

Such is the history of that celebrated Portiuncula indulgence popularly called the Grand Pardon of Assisi. How can doubt be thrown upon it, when it is affirmed by such a saint as Francis, by reliable witnesses like Friar Masseo of Marignano, by historians so conscientious and enlightened as Bernard of Besse and S. Antoninus, Archbishop of Florence? Might we not say, with the latter, that the sacred stigmata, imprinted a little later upon the saint's flesh, are like a Bull of the eternal Pontiff, the authorisation of the Order of Penitence and of the Grand Pardon of Assisi?

Need we add to such testimonies that of an old man, a contemporary of S. Francis, and whose deposition is thus related by the Venerable John of Alverno? "In the year 1309 an old man, over a hundred years of age, from the neighbourhood of Perugia, and a fervent tertiary, had walked nearly a league to go to Portiun-

* Bernard of Besse, Bartholomew of Pisa, S. Antoninus, Conrad, Bishop of Assisi, &c.

cula and gain the indulgence of the 2d of August." His confessor, John of Alverno, could not refrain from extolling such great zeal at such an advanced age. "Father," replied the old man, "if my feet refused their service, I would come on the back of a mule rather than lose the advantage of such a great day." "And why?" "Because it is to me a sacred memory. I was present when S. Francis, going to Perugia, came, as was his wont, to crave our hospitality. He told us he was going to ask the Pope to confirm the indulgence he had obtained from on high. Since that time I have not missed a single year in coming down here on the day of the Great Pardon."

Let us also cite our Lord's reply to S. Bridget. Having doubted the authenticity of this indulgence, the Saviour appeared to her and said, "My daughter, falsehood is not found where truth and the fire of divine charity dwell. Now Francis, My faithful servant, possessed the truth, and what he said is true. Seeing men's indifference to God and their insatiable passion for earthly goods, he asked Me for a token of love, in order to extinguish the fire of cupidity in their souls and enkindle therein that of charity. The token I gave him, I who am Love, was that all those who shall come with empty hands into his place will return full of My blessings and with the entire remission of their sins."

Besides, for every Catholic, one word decides the whole question, "Rome has spoken." Peter's successors have solemnly confirmed this indulgence, have extended it to all the churches of the three Orders, and, by an exceptional favour, allowed it to subsist in the jubilee years, and even in times of inter-

dict.* So everybody came with confidence to visit this modest chapel of Portiuncula, which, with the Casa Santa of Loretto, has become one of the gems of Italy and one of the most venerated sanctuaries in the world. This little corner of Umbria is truly the classic land of miracles, and the memory of S. Francis is doubly perpetuated. There the bushes in the garden are every year covered with white and red roses, bloodstained flowers on thornless stems;† and on the 1st and 2d of August every year thousands of pilgrims ‡ from every country come to pray where the Seraph of Assisi prayed, to seek the pardon he obtained for them, and to recover with the purity of baptismal innocence the only desirable joys, the joys of divine love. The pavement of the chapel is literally worn by the knees of the faithful, and the walls bear the imprint of the burning kisses of six generations. Indeed, are we not forced to own that these blessed spots are steeped in glory, and that this penitential battlefield eclipses all the battlefields

* Urban VIII. and Clement VIII. Let our readers at leisure examine the theological treasures this Portiuncula indulgence contains, and they will see that it is truly the pearl of the seraphic casket. Efficacy of prayer, intercessory power of Mary, primacy of honour and jurisdiction in the Papacy, all the most important dogmas of the Catholic Credo, are therein affirmed. Moreover, it has three characteristics that eminently distinguish it from all other indulgences:—1, its origin, which we have related; 2, its repetition at every visit; and 3, its perpetuity. It was the first time the Holy See granted an indulgence in perpetuity without works, almsgiving, or fast. In virtue of an apostolic indult it accompanies the child of S. Francis whom the misfortune of the times or some revolution constrains to retire for a moment into the obscurity of the catacombs. It is enough for him to erect an altar: that altar will be for him another S. Mary of Angels, and he will there find the Portiuncula of the revolutions.

† If these bushes are transplanted elsewhere, the thorns grow again and the bloodstains disappear.

‡ They exceeded 200,000 in the time of S. Bernardine of Siena.

of human ambition? Where find more accumulated marvels? Is there in the history of the Church a more consoling page for poor sinners? One does not know which to admire most, S. Francis's zeal for the salvation of souls, or the power of God who with the merest trifles produces marvels, in order that, by this contrast between the weakness of the means and the greatness of the results, men may be compelled to cry out, "The finger of God is there!"

Not less astonishing is the jealous care with which Providence guards the stones of that humble sanctuary. Twice, in 1832 and in 1854, earthquakes caused serious damage to the splendid basilica with which the sixteenth century overshadowed it as with a queenly mantle; a hundred times political revolutions have upset the country; Portiuncula still stands intact with the delightful perfume of poverty its plain bare walls exhale. May it escape the vandalism of modern impiety, as it has resisted until now the ravages of time! May it soon again witness the multitudes, the ardour, and the piety of the Middle Ages! And since every Franciscan chapel is another S. Mary of Angels, may modern peoples return to this easy pilgrimage! For, it should never be forgotten, it is in the sanctuaries of the Immaculate Virgin and through her merciful intercession they will recover the two most essential elements of social life—peace in time and hope of a better life.

In the year 1222, in the interval between the two scenes at Portiuncula, Francis, always devoured with zeal for souls, had made a long excursion through Southern Italy, the only portion of the peninsula he had not yet evangelised. Going down by Rome, Gaeta, and Naples, he had gone as far as the point of the peninsula to visit on his way the grotto of Monte San

Angelo or Monte Gargano, so celebrated by the apparition of S. Michael; then retraced his way to Umbria by the coast of the Adriatic. We will not follow him step by step in this apostolic journey, so as not to fatigue our readers; but we will content ourselves with recording the principal incidents.

At Toscanella our saint, stopping at the house of a signor whose only son was paralysed in both legs, cured the young invalid by the sign of the cross. At Rome he made the acquaintance of Matteo di Rubei of the patrician family of the Orsini, who assumed the penitential habit, his entrance into the Third Order making such an impression that his example attracted a crowd of distinguished personages. With Francis, the benedictions of Heaven descended upon his host's house, and were confirmed by a prediction which touched all hearts. The prince had a son still at the breast, and begged the saint, in whom he had every confidence, to bless him. Francis blessed the little Giovanni—it was the name of the predestined child, then took him in his arms, caressed him, and, gazing fixedly and benevolently upon him, cried, "This child will not be a religious of our Order, but he will be its protector. He will not be classed with the faithful but will be recognised as Universal Pastor, and our brethren will rejoice to live under his protection." Forty-one years after, Giovanni Orsini was nominated Cardinal-Protector of the Franciscans, and in 1277 ascended the pontifical throne under the name of Nicholas III. Thus was our saint's prophecy verified.

From Rome Francis went to Subiaco to visit the grotto of S. Benedict, the illustrious founder of the monastic life in the West. They showed him the thorny thicket where, six centuries before, S. Benedict

had extinguished the fire of concupiscence in a temptation like his. Regarding those thorns as a kind of triumphal couch resplendent with the heroism of that valiant athlete, he kissed them respectfully, made the sign of the cross over them, and immediately they were transformed into rose bushes, which still subsist as a perpetual witness of the two great patriarchs.

From thence Francis went to Gaeta, an ancient and celebrated port, where Heaven authorised his mission by two prodigies. One day while the servant of God was preaching in the public square opposite the harbour, and the crowd thronged round him to touch the hem of his garments, he cast himself alone into a barque to escape these importunate demonstrations. To the great astonishment of every one the barque moved off without an oar being stirred, as if it obeyed the arm of an invisible pilot; then stood motionless in the midst of the waters, to allow the saint to continue his preaching, and returned of its own accord to the bank at the close of the discourse, while the multitude, rapt with admiration, slowly and silently dispersed. Who, then, would be so hard-hearted, so obstinate in error, as to despise the teaching of an apostle whom inanimate things themselves eagerly obeyed as if with conscious docility?* So the inhabitants of Gaeta were docile to the teaching of the holy thaumaturgist. They begged him to remain some time longer with them, and to establish a house of his Order in their ancient city. Now it happened that, during the progress of the works, a carpenter was crushed by the fall of one of the beams of the scaffolding. His corpse was nothing but one horrible wound, and his comrades were obliged to take him home quickly. Luckily on their way they met the seraphic Patriarch,

* S. Bonaventure, c. xii.

who, moved by sympathy and compassion, had recourse to God's omnipotence. He commanded them to set down the litter, made the sign of the cross over the dead man, and, calling him by his name, said, "Arise!" And the dead man immediately arose, full of strength and health, returned thanks to God and Francis, and gaily returned to the workshop.*

At the gates of Gaeta our saintly missionary accomplished a still more surprising prodigy, which is generally known as "the miracle of the apples." The occurrence took place in a village situated on the Roman road leading to Capua; we reproduce it just as it is related in Mariana, preserving its characteristic simplicity.

Our saint, having gone into the house of a certain signor to take a little rest, he was received with honour and invited to dinner; he accepted, but wished first of all to announce the Word of God and repaired to the public square. The signor and his family followed him thither to hear him preach, leaving a servant in the house to take care of their only son still very young. The servant, lured by the sentiment of curiosity natural to her sex, left the child quite alone and ran to mingle with the crowd. Could she foresee the horrible calamity that awaited her? On her return, she found the child dead, half burned, floating in a caldron of boiling water. Pale with dread, wrung with remorse, she drew out the shapeless corpse and put it into a chest. Imagine the grief of the father and mother at the sad news! However, they both controlled their sorrow so as not to sadden the man of God; and when he returned not a word, not a sob, not a sign, betrayed their emotion. During the meal, the

* They have built a chapel on the very spot where this miracle occurred.

saint, knowing the merciful designs of Providence in their regard, spoke with the charming gaiety habitual to him. At dessert he feigned a desire to eat some apples, and as his hosts expressed their regret at not having them, "See there," said he, pointing to the piece of furniture containing the corpse, "open, and you will find apples." The signor for a moment hesitates; then, obeying out of respect for the saint, opens the chest with a trembling hand, and what does he see? His son resuscitated, full of life, who turns towards him a smiling face, holding an apple in each hand. Inebriated with joy and happiness, the father takes his son in his arms and throws himself at the saint's feet, rendering to God and His servant Francis a thousand thanksgivings. It was thus He who had raised the son of the widow of Naim was pleased to repay the hospitality given to His voluntary poor.

On another occasion Providence manifested in a touching manner the maternal solicitude with which it watches over its servants. Here, too, we leave the relation to Mariana. "Our Blessed Father, after preaching the whole day at Montella, had gone to pass the night in the wood overlooking that little town. The snow then covered the ground—rather an unusual thing in Italy—and the saint and his companion had no other shelter than the branches of an oak. Now, God permitted these branches to serve them as a roof. The next morning the passers-by remarked that there was not a flake of snow around the religious nor on their garments, and they looked upon this occurrence as a miracle. The lord of Montella, having heard of it, sent for the saint and begged him to leave some of his disciples in the country to instruct the faithful. Francis consented. They built a convent on the very place of

the prodigy, and the Friars Minors sanctified by their presence that wood, which until then had been the resort of banditti."

So many miracles are not sown under his footsteps, such popular enthusiasm is not aroused, and he does not pass through their midst as the standard-bearer of truth, without at the same time exciting the passions and hatred of the wicked against him. Our saint was to be tried in this way more than any one else, but in a manner quite unexpected. Having gone to Barri, where Frederick II., Emperor of Germany and King of the Two Sicilies, then resided, the ardent apostle preached the Word of God with apostolic freedom, fulminating anathemas against the disorders of the court, as well as the lawlessness of the people. The fame of his preaching having reached the ears of Frederick II., a prince of excitable disposition and dissolute morals, who, already irritated at seeing the simultaneous progress of the Order of Penitence and the party of the Guelphs, resolved to ruin the bold missionary. Either that he dared not have recourse to violence, or that he found it easier to publicly discredit an adversary whose influence he dreaded, but in whose virtue he had no confidence, here is the snare he laid for him. He invited him to dine at the palace, and, after the repast, had him conducted to one of the towers where he had secretly introduced an abandoned woman. Everything was arranged, it must be admitted, with diabolical malice; a weak virtue had infallibly perished; the chastity of Francis came victorious out of this temptation adorned with a new splendour. As soon as he saw the courtesan, he strewed the pavement with burning brands and stretched himself upon the glowing embers. At this sight the terri-

fied woman fled. The prince, who waited at the door the issue of this affair, entered the room and said to Francis, "I now recognise that you are a man of God." And he willingly hearkened to the counsels and remonstrances of the saint, counsels and remonstrances, unfortunately for him and his people, too soon forgotten.*

Such, in a few words, are the principal events of the year 1222. In that six or seven months' excursion through the Italian peninsula, Francis contrived to found twenty new convents, and thus propagate his Order without ceasing to labour efficaciously at the salvation of souls.

Meanwhile the evangelical labourers he had dispersed throughout Europe, fertilised with their toil and sweat the ground assigned to them, and they, too, reaped an abundant harvest of souls and disciples. They were Bernard of Quintavalle in Spain, Angelo and Albert of Pisa in England, Cæsar of Spires in Germany, and Pacificus in France. No need for their success to be recounted here; but, among their spiritual conquests, there is one we cannot omit, on account of the share our saint had in it, and the influence he was to exercise on the destinies of the Order and the progress of scholastic theology—we mean the vocation of Alexander of Hales.† He was then the most celebrated doctor of the University of Paris, and all the youth of the schools thronged round his chair. Very different from the sceptical professors of our days, he was specially distinguished for his devotion to Mary not less than his vast erudition; and had gone so far as to promise to grant, if possible, anything asked for

* Bartholomew of Pisa.

† Native of Hales, Gloucestershire, England.

the love of the Blessed Virgin.* This particularity, apparently so trifling, decided his vocation. One day a Friar Minor, meeting him, said, "Doctor, you have served the world long enough and acquired a sufficient reputation. Our Institute has not yet any doctors or learned professors; I beg you then, for the love of God and the Blessed Virgin, to put on this coarse habit. You will be the honour of our Order, and will sanctify your soul." Alexander, remembering his promise, heartily responded, "Go, brother; I will follow shortly and do what you wish." A few days after he passed from the grandeurs of the world to the humility of the cloister and put on the habit of the Friars Minors (1222), thus teaching his contemporaries that all the splendours and pageants of earth fade before the simple happiness of that life which is to love God and immolate oneself for Him. Nevertheless, what a sacrifice! And who that has not realised it can understand all the interior combats and struggles a soul suffers when, by a sovereign act of its liberty, it breaks at one wrench the bonds that attach it to the world? Often the bleeding wound long remains, and to close it needs the hand of the Divine Master and the balm of grace. Alexander experienced those pains and heart-rendings, and at first the religious life appeared so distasteful to him that he thought of quitting the Order. One night this thought tortured him more violently. Francis appeared to him laden with a very heavy cross, toiling up a mountain. Alexander offered to help him; but the saint repulsed him indignantly, saying, "Retire, wretched man! What! thou canst not bear a light cross of wood, and thou wouldst bear this!" The novice, enlightened and fortified by this vision,

* S. Antoninus.

was delivered from the temptation that besieged him, and persevered to the end in his religious vocation. The holy Patriarch of Assisi, a great appreciator and friend of merit, as often as he found it united to piety, allowed him to continue his public teaching—a favour he only granted to two of his disciples, Alexander of Hales and S. Anthony of Padua. Alexander then reappeared in the Franciscan habit in the chairs of the University of Paris, and with such *éclat* that he merited the laudations of the Sovereign Pontiff and his contemporaries, who gave him the glorious title of "the Irrefutable Doctor." It is known how, by his Theological Summa, he laid the first stone of the sublime edifice the angelic doctor was to finish; but his grandest title to popular veneration is, in our opinion, having had for disciples the two greatest doctors of the Church in the Middle Ages, S. Bonaventure and S. Thomas of Aquin.*

The Order was yet only in its cradle, and already it had acquired glory in many ways. Berard had brought it the aureola of martyrdom, Anthony of Padua that of the apostolate, and Alexander of Hales that of theological science.

* Here is what we read in Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, and a great admirer of Alexander of Hales. "S. Thomas was one day asked, 'What is the best method of studying theology?' "To apply oneself to one theologian,' replied the Angel of the schools. 'But what theologian should we select?' 'Alexander of Hales?'" This eulogium needs no comment. Unfortunately the *Theological Summa* of the Irrefutable Doctor is lost. Alexander of Hales died in 1245.

CHAPTER XIV.

Origin and Epitome of the Rule—Its spirit.

(*1223.*)

For a long time Francis thought of modifying his primitive Rule, to which Innocent III. had given his verbal approval. A new apparition of our Lord enabled him to decide. Although the old chroniclers have indicated neither the place nor precise date of this apparition, the connection between the saint's habits and surrounding circumstances leads us to think that it took place a very short time after the promulgation of the Great Pardon of Portiuncula (1223), and in his favourite sanctuary, Our Lady of Angels.

One night, while at prayer, he was enveloped with a supernatural light. The ground seemed covered with bits of bread, which he carefully gathered to distribute to his hungry brethren, and which were so small that he trembled to see them slip from his fingers. A heavenly voice reassuringly said, "Francis, blend all these bits into a single host, and give to all who shall wish to eat thereof." He did so, and all who received their share with contempt or indevotion seemed to him stricken with leprosy. In the morning he recounted his vision in presence of the brethren, regretting, in common with them, his inability to understand its mystical sense. The next day, while he was praying, the same heavenly voice resounded in his inmost soul, and said, "Francis, the morsels of the previous night symbolise the words of the Gospel; the host is the Rule, and the leprosy iniquity." * He

* S. Bonaventure, chap. iv.

interpreted this to be the answer of Heaven to his projects; and taking with him two of his brethren, Leo and Bonizo, retired to the cleft of a rock at Monte Colombo, near Rieti, the better to prepare by prayer and fasting for the recasting of his Rule. There it was written under the dictation of the Holy Spirit; and after forty days he returned to communicate it to Friar Elias, Vicar-General, in order that the latter should study it, and cause it to be observed. Elias found it too austere, and, in place of producing it, pretended he had mislaid the Rule, hoping to suppress it.

Without saying anything, the humble Francis returned to his rocky retreat. He was still there when our Lord deigned to apprise him of the plot formed by the Vicar-General and the other Provincials of his party, who were ascending the mountain with the object of soliciting certain mitigations which they considered indispensable. The saint went to meet them, and said in a voice of emotion, "What have you come here for, you and those Ministers-Provincial who are with you?" "They have learned," said Elias, with downcast eyes, "that you intended to give them a Rule above human strength, and they have deputed me to request you to modify it, because they will not receive it if it is too rigorous." At these words the saint groaned, and raising his eyes to heaven, cried, "Lord, have I not said that they would not believe me? For my part, I shall keep this Rule unto death with all those of my companions who love poverty. As to the others, I do not pretend to compel them against their will." At that moment the Son of God appeared over the head of Francis, in the midst of a luminous cloud, and in a stern voice uttered these words, heard by all,

"Little man, why troublest thou thyself, as if it was thy work? It is I who am the author of this Rule; thy rôle and thy mission consist in transmitting it to thy brethren. I know of what human weakness is capable, and to what extent I will sustain it. It is My will, therefore, that this Rule be observed to the letter, to the letter, to the letter, without glossary, without glossary, without glossary. Let those who refuse to observe it quit the Order. I will raise up others in their place, and, if need be, will create them out of these very stones."

The vision disappeared. Elias and his companions were astounded; Francis, who had thrown himself on his knees, thus vehemently reproached them, "Did you know that with your carnal prudence you are resisting the will of God? Have you heard the Voice issuing from the clouds?" They retired without uttering a word, covered with shame and confusion.

The countenance of our saint, like that of another Moses, was radiant with light as he descended the mountain and returned to Our Lady of Angels, to propound the new Rule to his brethren. "There is nothing of mine in it," he declared. "I have only written it under the dictation of the Most High." They all unanimously accepted it, and Pope Honorius III., having received it from the hands of Francis, solemnly approved it by a Bull dated Rome, November 29th, 1223. Our Lord gave S. Bridget to understand the heavenly origin of this Rule. "It was not composed by the mind of man," said He, "but by God Himself. It does not contain a word that was not inspired by My Spirit, and Francis has communicated it without adding a single iota thereto." "It bears unexceptionable intrinsic evidence of the Most Holy and Adorable Trinity," says Pope

Nicholas III. in his exposition of the Rule. "It has come down from the Father of Lights, the apostles were taught it by the example and doctrine of the Son, and S. Francis derived it by inspiration from the Holy Spirit."

From these authoritative testimonies it follows that the seraphic Rule is more than a stroke of genius: it is the fruit of divine inspiration. The holy Patriarch reaffirms it in his testament, and more than once during the three last years of his life availed of this incentive to exhort his brethren to lovingly bear the voluntary chains they had assumed. "Dearest children," said he, "our Lord has singularly favoured us in giving us this holy Rule! It is the book of life, the hope of salvation, the pledge of glory, the marrow of the Gospel, the way of Calvary, the life of perfection, the key of Paradise, the bond of an eternal alliance. Ponder on it continuously in your inmost hearts; have it always before your eyes, in order to observe it exactly; and never lay it aside, not even at your death." *

Such is the origin and such the excellence of the Franciscan Rule.

It was probably in the course of the same year, 1223, † the saint obtained from the Holy See a Cardinal-Protector charged with the spiritual interests of the Order. The occasion arose under these circumstances. Upon the death of the illustrious Cardinal, John of S. Paul, those half-Christians who are found in every epoch of history, dismayed by the reformer's fearlessness, presented a bold front, and by dint of intrigues succeeded in gaining over to their cause several members of the Pontifical court. On hearing of these

* Bartholomew of Pisa.
† *Acta Sanctorum.*

plots and underhand machinations, so foreign to his frank and loyal character, the saint was deeply afflicted, and could not refrain from giving expression to his loving plaints before the Divine Master, who deigned to console him by pointing out in a mysterious dream both the malady and its cure. Francis saw in sleep a little black hen with dove's feet, * who was vainly striving to gather under her wings her numerous chickens to protect them from the attacks of a kite, but could not overshadow them all, and several, gambolling around her, were in great danger. But, lo! above her hovered a large bird who protected the hen and her chickens with its broad wings. On awaking he begged in his simplicity our Lord to explain the meaning of this vision, and learned that the chicken with the dove's feet represented himself, that the chickens were his children, and that the bird with the large wings figured the Cardinal Protector he was to ask from the Sovereign Pontiff. He immediately summoned his brethren, told them of his vision, and concluded with these memorable words:—"The Roman Church is the mother of all the Churches and the Sovereign of all the religious Orders. It is to her I shall commend my brethren, that by her authority she may repress those who would injure them, and ensure the children of God their full and entire liberty. When they will be under her protection, no one will dare disturb them, and the workers of iniquity will no longer ravage with impunity the vineyard of the Lord. The holy Roman Church will be zealous for the glory of our poverty; she will no longer suffer the beautiful virtue of humility to be obscured by pride. She will punish rigorously instigators of dissensions, and render the bonds of peace and

* *Legend of the Three Companions.*

charity among us indissoluble. Under her eyes the observance of the Rule will flourish, and our religious practices will everywhere diffuse a good odour of life. May the children of this holy Church, then, be full of gratitude for the gracious favours they shall receive from their Mother; let them kiss her feet with filial devotion, and vow to her the most inviolable attachment."

Some time after Francis set out for Rome, where he found Cardinal Ugolino, Bishop of Ostia, who came from his Florentine legation, and broached his design of asking the Holy Father for a Cardinal-Protector of his Order. The cardinal, after favourably receiving his proposition, earnestly exhorted him to preach before the Pope and the Sacred College to conciliate their good graces. Francis, despite his humility, had to yield to the prelate's reiterated entreaties. He composed a fine discourse, then, by his advice, and devoted several hours to fixing it in his memory; but when he was in presence of his august auditory forgot it all, and could not repeat a single word of what he had written. He explained his misadventure in all simplicity; then, having invoked the assistance of the Holy Spirit, he spoke unstudied as was his wont, but in so persuasive and attractive a way that his noble auditors were enraptured. "They knew then that it was not he who spoke, but the Spirit of God that spoke by his mouth." *

Honorius III. granted the saint's request, and confided to the Bishop of Ostia the charge of Cardinal-Protector of the Order of Friars Minors.

* S. Bonaventure, chap. xii. Since Benedict XIV., it is always a Friar Minor Capuchin who preaches the Lent in the apostolic palace.

Let us pause for a moment before the majestic figure of this old man. Cardinal Ugolino was one of the most accomplished personages in the Pontifical court. Of the illustrious house of the Counts of Segni, nephew of Innocent III., a man of great mind and still greater heart, doctor, jurist, and orator, he was as firm in defending the rights of justice and truth, as compassionate towards the weak and poor. Full of esteem and respect for the Friars Minors, he took a pleasure in visiting their monasteries and leading their penitential life. "How often have they not seen him lay aside the insignia of his dignity, put on the coarse habit of the religious, and, barefooted, take part in their exercises and speak to them of God! On his part Francis had a real filial piety towards him, and relied upon him in every temporal solicitude, as the child reposes peacefully on its mother's bosom." *

Having learned by revelation that this old man would one day ascend the Pontifical throne, his respect and veneration increased, and he headed his letters to him, "To my reverend father and lord Ugolino, future bishop of the whole world and common Father of the faithful." One day, apprised that the cardinal was coming to visit him, he fled and concealed himself in the depths of a wood. The prelate having discovered his retreat, kindly inquired the reason of his flight. "My lord and father," humbly replied Francis, "as soon as I knew your lordship wished to honour me with your presence, I, the poorest and least of men, was covered with confusion, esteeming myself absolutely unworthy of such an honour." We cannot forego the pleasure of relating the following anecdote; nothing shows us more of the inner life of those two personages,

* Thomas of Celano.

and better illustrates the simplicity of the one and the kindness of the other. The saint, invited to dine at the cardinal's, first went and begged some bits of black bread in the city; then, placing them on his host's table, distributed them to the guests, prelates, knights, and chaplains. After dinner the cardinal took the saint aside and gently chided him. "Why affront me by having recourse to alms, when my house is at thy service and that of thy brethren?" "My lord," replied Francis, slightly smiling, "I have neither shamed nor affronted you; on the contrary, I have done you a great honour in imitating our Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect lover of voluntary poverty. That is why I am more delighted in being seated at a poor table covered with charitable donations, than at a sumptuous table laden with viands and succulent meats." "Go, my son," replied the cardinal, "and do what seems good to thee; for I see that God is with thee." * These few incidents we have grouped around the figure of the venerable cardinal are enough to show how worthy he was of his mission.

It is time to make a more detailed study of the constitution of the first Order, a constitution upon which the Sovereign Pontiffs have bestowed such praises, and which served as a model for that of the Clarisses and the Third Order; it is time to examine its aim, its means of action, and the place it assigns to the Friars Minors among the other phalanxes of the Church.

The creation of this new Order was a conception as novel as bold; it filled a gap then keenly felt in monastic institutions. The principal aim of the sons of S. Benedict was the culture of land and letters; of the

* *Legend of the Three Companions.* The incident occurred at Rome.

disciples of S. Augustin and S. Norbert, the splendour of divine worship and praise; of S. Bruno's, the purely contemplative life. No regular militia had yet thought of devoting itself exclusively to the ministry of preaching. This gap the Patriarch of Assisi, contemporaneously with his friend S. Dominic, had just filled; for his Order was, above all, an order of preachers; an order that, following the example of the Saviour and the apostles, united the active to the contemplative life. It was a picked troop, ever ready to rush to the most perilous points at a sign from the Pope or the bishops. This special end God Himself had clearly revealed by the voices of S. Clare and the Blessed Sylvester. The Rule was then only designed to be, and is in reality, but a help to its more easy attainment.

It is divided into twelve chapters, of which we give the substance. "The Rule and life of the Friars Minors consist in observing the holy Gospel of our Lord, living in obedience, without personal property, and in chastity. Brother Francis promises obedience and devotion to our holy Father Pope Honorius, and his successors canonically elected, and the Roman Church. And let the other brothers be bound to obey Friar Francis and his successors." The second chapter treats of the admission of novices. The Provincial alone, in his province, is empowered to admit them after a mature examination in the Catholic faith and the sacraments of the Church, but never to interfere in their temporal affairs. The postulants, before entering, must sell all their goods, and, if they can, distribute the price to the poor. There is a year's probation. The costume recalls that of the Saviour and the apostles; it is a large sack-like robe to which are stitched some pieces, with a cord for cincture and sandals for shoes.

The Order is composed of two very distinct classes —clerics and laics. S. Francis, with a luminous hand, drew out a *modus vivendi* for both: to the first he assigns spiritual works, particularly preaching; to the second, the manual labour of the convent. The clerics recite the Divine Office according to the *Ordo* of the Roman Church; the others substitute for it a certain number of *Paters*.* But all must lead the common life, observe the same fasts, strive above all to acquire the spirit of holy prayer and devotion upon which everything depends, edify the brethren and worldlings by their modesty, meekness, and humility; in fine, avoid every kind of suspicious relationship with women. S. Francis recommends the priests of his Order when preaching to have nothing else in view but the salvation of souls, to expatiate, in unstudied and unaffected language, upon vice or virtue, punishment or glory. He allows those who feel called thereto, to go and evangelise the Saracens and other infidels. The cornerstone of the Order, the keystone of the arch of this religious edifice, is seraphic poverty. Not only every religious shall individually renounce all property, as in all the other Orders, but the whole Order itself shall reject absolutely and for ever every temporal possession. This is the capital point of the Rule; and the holy founder continually reverts to it, in order that there may be no misconception as to his meaning. But where are the means to be found to feed this multitude of Friars? How provide for their daily wants? S. Francis does not fail to indicate it. Taking Providence as his model—Providence that, while furnishing food to the tiniest birds, does not dispense them for going to

* The colour of the habit, rising at night, sleeping upon boards, &c., are only traditional, and regulated by special constitutions.

look for it themselves—he wishes that his sons should go out and beg the necessaries of life: "I formally forbid all my brethren," he says, "to receive any coin whatsoever, either themselves or through the intermediary of another person. Let them have nothing of their own, neither house, nor land, nor anything whatever; but, looking upon themselves as travellers and strangers in this world, serving the Lord in poverty and humility, let them go with confidence to ask alms, and let them beware of being ashamed of it, because our Lord became poor for us. This, dearest brethren, is the excellence of the loftiest poverty, that it has made you heirs and kings of the kingdom of heaven, stripped you of every earthly possession, but elevated you in virtue. Let it be your portion, that which leads to the land of the living. Cling to it, dear brethren, with all your might, and, for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, never consent to possess anything under heaven." He then adds these soothing words, in which his whole heart is revealed:—"Let the brethren, wherever they reside or happen to meet, hasten to render each other mutual service, and freely make known their wants; for if a mother nourishes and loves her son according to the flesh, with how much more affection should each one love and nourish his brother according to the spirit! And if one of them falls ill, the other brothers should tend him as they would wish to be tended themselves."

A Cardinal-Protector is officially charged with the spiritual interests of the Order.

As to the government of this immense family of Friars Minors, it is a perfect imitation of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in its different degrees. At the head of each convent is a guardian, elected by the Minister-Provincial and his council, and each province is

governed by a provincial who enjoys quasi-episcopal jurisdiction. All the convents and provincials are subject to the authority of a General who resides in Rome.

The elections take place every three years, or at a longer or shorter term, at the option of the General. And in order that all may be intimately united to the Catholic Church, the General with his whole Order immediately depend on the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Thus the last link of this religious hierarchy reaches up to God, principle and source of all authority. Why this immediate dependence on the Holy See, and not on the bishops? The legislator himself gives us the reason at the end of the Rule: "It is in order that, always subject to this same Roman Church, prostrate at her feet and confirmed by her in the Catholic faith, we should observe poverty, humility, and the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we have promised on oath."

Such are the principal clauses of the seraphic Rule. By its distinctive character of penitence and austerity, it is at once seen that it belongs to those times remarkable for the energetic pursuit of good or evil called the Middle Ages; by its depth and simplicity we recognise its supernatural origin: human genius does not thus invent. In crucifying nature, it favours the action of grace, and helps souls to rise to the highest degrees of union with God. "Whoever observes it with exactitude," says S. Vincent Ferrier, "is a saint." Being the marrow of the Gospel, it should cause the manners of the early Christians to reflourish in the cloister shade, and, by the good example of the Friars, bring back multitudes to the practice of the faith; for great virtues have a special power of attraction, and it is to

the honour of faithful nations that they know not how to resist.

However wise this Rule may be, there is something still more admirable: it is the spirit that animates it. "Each Order," says a celebrated writer of our day, "has its spirit; otherwise, had it the best laws in the world, it would not live; it would be a statue or a corpse. It is the spirit that vivifies the laws, sustains discipline, causes works to fructify, and renders institutions immortal. In the religious Orders this spirit is so potent, that it renders those societies, apparently so frail, unprotected by material force either against revolutions within or enemies without, indestructible for ages; it so deeply interpenetrates individuals that, so to speak, it imprints itself even on their physiognomy. But this spirit is not the same in every Order: for although all Orders tend to the same end, the perfection of souls in God, they do not reach it by the same road." * Here, it is prayer; there, it is works: the one gives the predominance to corporal mortifications, the other to works of charity. Now, the salient feature of the Franciscan Order, its *raison d'être*, what assigns it a place apart in the immense army of God, is evidently the spirit of poverty. Should it be said, on that account, that S. Francis neglects the other fundamental virtues of the religious life, particularly obedience? All his words and actions testify to the contrary. He did not ignore the fact that obedience is the basis of the monastic state, that it holds the sceptre of government, and that without it all is disorder and confusion. He required punctual obedience and in all things; and here is the remarkable comparison he used to depict

* *History of S. Chantal*, by the Abbé Bougaud.

a true religious. "Take a corpse, and put it where you like; change its position, or leave it alone; it will not utter the least complaint. Place it upon a throne, it will have its eyes fixed on the ground just the same; throw a purple mantle over its shoulders, it will be just as pale. Behold the image of the obedient religious: he does not trouble himself why they change him from convent to convent, why they assign him such a post rather than another. If raised to dignities, he is only the more humble. The more honours they pay him, the more he recognises his unworthiness." * "Do you want another similitude?" he added. "Imitate the blind man, who allows himself to be led along good or bad roads by the faithful animal that guides him. Obey blindly, without murmuring, without asking if the thing commanded is difficult or not, seeing only God who commands, the authority of the superior who holds His place, and the merit of obedience." He had a horror of the slightest infraction of this virtue; he execrated murmuring, and rigorously chastised revolt. Here is how he one day punished a disobedient Friar. After stripping him of his habit, he had him thrown into a grave and commanded them to bury him alive. When the dead leaves and gravel reached the culprit's waist, S. Francis said, "Brother, are you dead?" "Yes, Father," replied the religious; "I repent of my fault, and recognise that I have deserved death." "Since thou art truly dead to the world and thyself, as every good religious should be," pursued the saint, "arise and come. But henceforth obey the least sign, and offer no more resistance than a corpse to the will of thy superiors; for I want not living but dead men for

* S. Bonaventure, chap. vi.

disciples." * He always requires this self-forgetfulness, this immolation of the will, that annihilation of the old man, as the foundation of the spiritual edifice.

But if obedience makes the religious, Francis wished that poverty should always be the distinctive mark of the Friar Minor; it was the touchstone by which he recognised solid vocations and true disciples. Let us cite a few facts in support of this assertion.

In the early times of the Order (1212), a young Milanese presented himself, along with a brilliant equipage, at the door of the monastery of Portiuncula to solicit the honour of being admitted among the penitents of Assisi. A religious undertook to press his request. Perceiving this display of worldly vanity, Francis cried out, "Who are these great lords, and what do they want of me?" "Father," replied the religious, "it is a very learned young man of a rich Milanese family who wishes to enter our institute." "He seems to me hardly suited to us," replied the saint, shaking his head. "When one comes with such pomp to embrace a life of complete poverty, it is a proof the heart is not yet dead to the world, and has not entirely quitted it. However, I shall consult the brethren on the subject." He therefore called together his disciples and asked their opinion; they all came to the conclusion the young man should be sent away. On hearing this decision the postulant burst into tears. Then Francis, moved to compassion, said to his companions, "Are you willing we should accept him as cook, if he consents?" They agreed to this proposition, and the young man likewise. Francis, delighted at this act of humility, clasped him in his arms, gave him the holy habit, and sent him to the Hospice of

* Mariana.

S. Blaise at Rome, the direction of which he soon after confided to him on account of his eminent qualities.

Seven years after a young man of mature age, from the March of Ancona, made known his desire of consecrating himself to God in his Order. "My son," said Francis, "if thou wishest to join the poor of Jesus Christ, go, sell what thou hast, and give the price to the poor." The postulant went away, but, in place of distributing his goods in alms, assigned them to his family. A few days after he returned and presented himself before the saint. But the latter repulsed him, saying in a severe tone, "Brother Fly (it was the name he gave useless people), go thy way; thou hast not left thy house nor thy kindred; thou hast assigned thy fortune to thy relations and robbed the poor; thou dost not deserve to enter into the company of the poor of Jesus. Thou hast begun by the flesh; it is a ruinous foundation, and the whole edifice will crumble." He was not deceived; this man returned to his family, resumed possession of his domains, and quickly forgot his projects of perfection.*

The holy Patriarch missed no opportunity of inculcating the contempt of perishable riches, witness the following incident which we take from S. Bonaventure.† In the year 1222, during his apostolic journey through the kingdom of Naples, the saint had just quitted the town of Bari, when he saw at the roadside an enormous purse which seemed choke full of gold and silver pieces. His travelling companion, the angelical Brother Leo, asked permission to pick it up to give it to the poor, but upon the saint's refusal tranquilly pursued his way. From time to time, how-

* S. Bonaventure, chap. vii. † *Loc. cit.*

ever, he glanced furtively back at the purse, and renewed his entreaties to go and fetch it. At last the saint yielded. The Friar joyfully retraces his steps, but when he stoops to pick it up, a monstrous serpent darts out of it and disappears along with the purse. Brother Leo returns, more confused than terrified at having been tricked by Satan. The seraphic Father turns to him and quietly says, "O dear sheep of the good God, learn that, for religious, money is a reptile; it is the demon."

S. Francis wished poverty to be the chief adornment of his houses. Churches and cells, food and clothing, everything was to reflect this brilliant virtue, so that each religious might become a living mirror of the poverty of the Lord Jesus. For, according to that consummate master of the spiritual life, prayer and poverty are the two wings wherewith the soul takes its flight towards high heaven: poverty sunders bonds and breaks through obstacles, prayer begins and completes the union of love with God.

The most difficult self-despoilment, that which costs the soul the greatest efforts, is that of the natural gifts of mind, which Francis never failed to require. One day a young lay brother asked him for a psalter. Francis's only reply was to take up a handful of ashes, rub the novice's head vigorously with them, and then send him about his business, thus showing that a real Friar Minor should detach his heart from all fondness for self-judgment, from his natural lights, in fine, from all that could retard his advancement in the ways of perfection.

S. Francis went so far as to prefer, in a certain sense, poverty to piety. In the year 1220, Peter of Catana, then Vicar-General, seeing the monastery of

Our Lady of Angels in such penury that he found it impossible to discharge the duties of hospitality towards the foreign brethren, thought to avail himself of some of the money or clothing the novices brought with them. But first of all he wished to have the opinion of S. Francis. "My son," said the saint, "God preserve us from an act of piety that would be a flagrant violation of our Rule!" "But then, Father, what shall we do to feed our guests?" "If we were reduced to the direst necessity, I would prefer to see thee strip the Virgin's altar of all its riches and adornments, than to see thee trangress ever so little our vow of poverty; and the Blessed Virgin Mary herself, I am sure, would think herself more honoured by the observance of the evangelical counsels than by the richest decorations in the world." *

Let us not be surprised at such a marked predilection for the virtue of poverty. The holy founder only conformed to the will of God, clearly manifested in a supernatural vision related by S. Bonaventure. One day as Francis was going to Sienna with some of his disciples, he met in the plain of Compiglia three women, who might have been taken for three sisters, they were so perfectly alike: same age, same height, same facial outline, same simple dress. They advanced towards him, and, saluting him with a gracious air, said, "Welcome be the Lady Poverty!" and disappeared. Francis's companions, witnesses of this apparition, never doubted that it had a mystical meaning. In fact, it signified that the three virtues that constitute the essence and beauty of religious perfection—poverty, chastity, and obedience—were equally resplendent in the seraphic Patriarch; but

* S. Bonaventura.

that poverty, however, was his special prerogative and the brightest jewel in his crown.*

The spirit of poverty, perfect poverty, the preference given to this virtue over all others, such, undoubtedly, is the most salient feature in the physiognomy of S. Francis, the soul of all his undertakings, and one of the providential aspects of his mission; and he has so thoroughly interpenetrated his Order with it that even now, at six centuries distance, it still remains the original and distinctive characteristic of the family of the Friars Minors. One of the most admirable fruits of this spirit of poverty is an indescribable serenity, a gentle joy that beams upon the countenance of every true child of S. Francis, the secret source of which is known to every Christian. Those penitential men, those fervent disciples of Calvary, joyfully carry the cross of obedience and labour, of suffering and humiliations, because for them, as for their saintly founder, love has lightened the load.

Perhaps certain minds, imbued with the prejudices of the time, and understanding neither the excellence of voluntary poverty nor S. Francis's passionate love of that virtue, will think we insist too much upon this article. "We like the Institute of the Friars Minors as an apostolic Order," they will tell us; "we do not like it as a mendicant Order; its poverty is repugnant to us, and besides it is not in harmony with the progress of modern society." This language is not new: Guillaume de Saint-Amour had already held it in the thirteenth century, and at the same time S. Bonaventure refuted it in a masterpiece, *The Apology of the Poor*, which has never been controverted. At bottom, it is the eternal objection of the world to the Church,

* S. Bonaventure.

of selfishness to the spirit of sacrifice. Since it is now thrown in our faces with more acrimony than ever, we cannot avoid answering it in a few words.

"Poverty is repugnant to you!" But do you not know that the Son of God took it upon Him, and, in assuming, ennobled, deified, beatified it? Would you, therefore, repudiate the Gospel? When S. Bernard cries, "The love of poverty makes us kings;" S. Francis of Assisi, "It is it which has made you kings and heirs of the kingdom of heaven;" and S. Frances de Chantal, "It is a cause of glory before God and men and a reason to think one's self favoured when one has received the honours of poverty"—they only give expression to the thought of the Divine Master. Among Christians, this argument puts an end to all controversy. The love of poverty is, therefore, noble and sanctifying, as the love of money is degrading and satanic.

Moreover, to justify the existence of the Order of Friars Minors, it would be enough to say, "Look at its works and you will readily admit that it is, if not necessary, at least very useful to the people, to distribute to them the Bread of Truth, or teach them how to suffer; and in this double point of view its institution is one of the noblest thoughts that ever came from on high into the heart of man."

Who, in fact, does not feel that there is an infinite distance between the voluntary and ever-laborious poverty of which S. Francis was enamoured, and the hideous vice of pauperism or idle mendicancy? The holy founder seemed to say to his disciples, "There is a kind of tacit contract between the people and you. You will give them your time, the sweat of your brow, and your love, and break to them the Bread of Truth. That is your part; here is theirs. In exchange for your

services, they will feed you; and your best reward in this world will be the joy of having done good." Francis has not presumed too much upon the good sense and faith of Christian peoples. They have seen that the conditions of the contract were all to their advantage; and for more than six centuries they have been giving the material in exchange for the spiritual bread, and feeding the apostolic men who are praying, working, and devoting themselves to them."

Not only every Catholic, but every man who believes in a future life, will recognise the reality of the service rendered by the bearers of the divine word. As to those who treat the existence of heaven as a chimera, and confine all their happiness to the narrow prison of this world, economists and politicians, whoever they may be, we will content ourselves with asking them to ponder over these eloquent words of the Count de Montalembert:—"It is not only by direct and material almsgiving the monks served and sanctified Christian society, but much more by the honour they paid to poverty. That is one of the principal advantages the world derives from the religious Orders; but it is also one of the aspects the most repugnant to that spirit that wants to drive God out of modern society. The unbeliever does not love the poor; they remind him too much of the necessity of a retributive justice, of a future when every one will be assigned his place for eternity. He does not like people treating them kindly and sympathetically as the monks do. He feels that the power of the priesthood is rooted in the sorrows of this life. He would willingly repeat with Barrère, 'Alms is an invention of sacerdotal vanity.' He will

never prevail against the laws and needs of afflicted nature; but we know he has too often succeeded in securing the momentary triumph of the fatal system that seeks to make charity a humiliation, almsgiving a tax, and mendicity a crime, when the rich reprobate, more pitiless than the one in the Gospel, will not even tolerate Lazarus on the steps of his palace. It is precisely the reverse of what was wanted, of what the religious Orders have accomplished. They did not think it enough to alleviate poverty; they have honoured, consecrated, adopted, and espoused it as the grandest and royallest thing in the world. First of all, from the very origin of their institute, they opened their ranks to it, placing slaves, serfs, and the poorest of the poor alongside, and sometimes above, princes and nobles. To the poor outside their ranks, the monastic Order presented a spectacle more calculated than any other to console them and elevate them in their own eyes—that of the voluntary poverty and humiliation of the great ones of the earth who came in crowds to be enrolled under the habit." * We count, in fact, by thousands the sovereigns, dukes, barons, and women of the highest rank who came to bury in the cloisters grandeur and power of which the diminished grandeurs of our modern society can give no idea, and who, after quitting everything, immolated themselves upon the altar of the living God. Could a more eloquent lesson of humility and resignation be imagined? Is it necessary to add that the monastic Orders, inspired with the sentiments of Jesus Christ and His Church, have achieved a third result, the consequence of the two first? They have established fraternal relations between two classes of society

* *The Monks of the West.*

hitherto inimical, master and slave. All the regular militias of the Church have arisen one after the other to obtain this triple result, so eminently social; but since the era of the Middle Ages, none has more powerfully contributed to it than that of S. Francis of Assisi.

We leave these considerations to the serious meditation of our modern governments and reformers, in order that they may realise that to protect the mendicant Orders is to perform an act of justice, and to proscribe them to ruin the people. For the day when they shall deprive the poor of the hope of a better life and the salutary influence of voluntary poverty, there will be no longer any counterpoise against the spirit of revolt which is agitating all Europe; long pent-up hatreds will explode; and the moment will have come for the rich to tremble for their fortunes and their lives.

Let us now descend from these lofty considerations, and return to the annals of the seraphic Order to learn how the Saviour Himself sometimes deigned, at one time by miraculous and at another by sublime visions, to sustain the work of His faithful servant and strengthen wavering vocations. The Franciscan life was so hard! It was so contrary to worldly tastes and carnal appetites! Could the Redeemer of souls abandon those who were combating for Him, or whom He saw fainting in the fight? Who can be astonished, therefore, if He directly intervenes? For our part, we believe in the tenderness of His love, and that is why we enter with confidence upon a record full of marvels.

Borgo-San-Donino, a small town situated on the road from Placenza to Parma, still remembers the

prodigy the monastery of the Friars Minors witnessed in the year 1215. It was in their house, quite recently founded, the religious assembled to greet their blessed Father on his return from Spain. The guests were numerous and provisions scanty. In this state of distress Francis looked with confidence to heaven, and, in return, the Lord, having regard to the faith and merits of him who implored Him, made up for the scarcity in the convent by sending them miraculous bread.

A few years after we come across a miracle of the same kind, with this difference, however, that it is the work of the two illustrious Patriarchs, Dominic and Francis, and the fruit of their united prayers. This episode in their life is too charming, and too clearly reveals their spirit of faith, for us to deprive our readers of the pleasure of hearing it. Here are the terms in which a Spanish author, disciple and contemporary of S. Dominic, has transmitted it to posterity.* "Our blessed Father went to visit S. Francis in the convent of a small town where the latter was holding a chapter of his Order. It is known what a close friendship united them at Rome, and how they loved to discourse together of the things of God. When the dinner hour came round they apprised the two saints that provisions were completely wanting for the meal. They both had recourse to prayer, and feeling they were heard, gathered the religious into the refectory. Grace was said still more joyfully than usual, and they sat down. Dominic and Francis were in the places of honour, their eyes raised towards heaven. A few minutes had hardly elapsed when they saw entering the room twenty young men, who laid upon the table loaves rolled up in the folds

* See Chalippe, i. 5.

of their mantles, and then retired two by two with a modesty only equalled by their beauty. After the repast, our Father, S. Dominic, warmly exhorted the brethren, begging them never to distrust Providence even in the direst penury."

A novice of noble family and delicate habits, unable to endure the convent diet, resolved to return to the world. One morning he noiselessly quits his cell, repairs to the chapel, and utters a last prayer at the foot of the crucifix. Thereupon Our Lord appeared to him, accompanied by His most glorious Mother. "Why do you renounce your vocation, My son?" said he. "Lord," replied the novice, "this kind of life is too austere!" The Lord then takes a coarse loaf, dips it into the wound in His side, and says to him, "Eat this bread." The novice obeys and finds it delicious. The vision disappeared, and the young man returned to the monastery. Henceforward, when tempted by the demon, he mentally considered the loving wound of the Heart of Jesus, and his difficulties were transformed into delights.

Another novice was on the point of leaving the Order for a similar reason, he had taken a dislike to the coarse habit and particularly the capuche. But on the night he intended to leave having, according to his pious custom, knelt at the foot of the altar, he was rapt in spirit, and seemed to see a multitude of saints defile before him, walking two by two, blending their harmonious voices with the angelic choirs. Their garments were as white as snow, and their countenances as resplendent as the sun; but the three last eclipsed all the others. The young man was motionless with stupor and joy. Now one of the saints said to him, "Brother, those whom thou seest are all Friars

Minors; those two saints more brilliant than the others are S. Francis of Assisi and S. Anthony of Padua, and the last is a religious who died a few days ago. God gives them this dazzling attire in exchange for the poor habits they wore on earth." At these words the heavenly vision vanished, and the young novice returned to his cell, his heart inundated with joy and his soul full of courage, to fight until the evening of life the good fight of the Lord.*

The annals of the seraphic Order contain a thousand similar incidents. So, the Word Incarnate took His work to heart; proportioning graces and miracles to the difficulties of the Rule, He caused the Gospel counsels to reflourish and gradually repaired the ruins of His Church by S. Francis and the Order of Friars Minors.

To these two visions let us add another the gentle Fra Leone had, and which puts a divine seal upon the founder's teaching. It was a solemn hour. Francis, adorned with the sacred Stigmata, was stretched on his bed of pain at Assisi, preparing to quit this valley of tears. Brother Leo was watching by his couch, praying fervently. Now, during his prayer, he was rapt in ecstasy and led in spirit to the banks of a deep, broad, rushing river which the religious of his Order were preparing to cross. He saw them enter the stream, but, sorrowful to relate, some were drowned at once, the others, struggling against the violence of the current, got about a third or half-way across the river, but, embarrassed in their movements by the heavy baggage they were carrying, finally disappeared likewise under the water. At such a heartrending spectacle the gentle Brother Leo wept. He would

* Bernard of Besse.

liked to have held out a helping hand to the poor strugglers, but an invincible force chained him to the bank. He therefore stood still, gloomy and pensive, when a totally different scene met his gaze. A multitude of Friars ran towards him, clad in a poor habit and burdenless. He saw them in turn plunge into the river, easily part the waves, and soon after reach the other bank.

At that moment the vision disappeared. Francis, interiorly enlightened as to the existence and meaning of this supernatural favour, summoned his favourite disciple and begged him to relate it. Brother Leo, who concealed nothing from his blessed Father, obeyed with his usual candour, and fully detailed all that he had seen, ingenuously confessing that he did not understand its signification. When he had ended, the saint, rising from his couch, said, "Dear little sheep of the good God, here is the meaning of the vision thou hast seen. The river is a figure of this world. Those who are shipwrecked are the religious who, after having given themselves unreservedly to God, look behind and violate their sacred engagements to return to the vanities of the age. Those who happily cross the river are the Friars who remain faithful to their vocation, that is to say, who are content with what is strictly necessary for their food and clothing, follow Christ naked on the naked cross, and joyfully bear upon their shoulders the sweet, light yoke of the Lord. That is why they easily pass through the surging waves of this world to the eternal shore." *

Finally, there is another prodigy not less surprising than those we have just related. It is to see young men of good family daily renouncing all the pleasures

* *Fioretti:* Mariana.

of life to put on the Franciscan habit; and the whole Order, despite its absolute self-despoilment, pursues its vocation for centuries, flourishing upon every shore, everywhere preaching penance and everywhere evoking the respect and veneration of true Catholics and the hatred of the impious! How can one fail to see in this fact a kind of permanent miracle? We defy the wise men of the day to explain it rationalistically, unless they admit with us that Providence watches over the destinies of the Franciscan family.

CHAPTER XV.

Portrait of S. Francis—His Virtues—His Love of God—His Charity towards Men.

Francis, not fully forty-two, already approaches the close of his career, so short in the eyes of men, so full of merits before God. We have seen the brilliant rising of that beautiful star and were thrilled with admiration; we are about to witness its setting in the midst of still greater marvels. But let us first have the consolation of gazing for the last time on the venerated features of his countenance and the virtues of his soul.

Two fine portraits of the seraphic Father are still preserved in the basilica of S. Mary of Angels; one is painted on the plank that served him as a bed, the other, from the pencil of Guinta of Pisa, his contemporary and friend, adorns the door of the large sacristy. We shall draw our inspiration from those two pictures

to give a better idea of the holy Patriarch. We find there the same *ensemble*, the same features, as in his portrait when a young man, only they are somewhat modified by age, austerities, and the secret influences of virtue. His beard, which he allowed to grow negligently, is black and rather thick; his cheeks pale, furrowed by fasts and extremely thin; his eyes are almost blind from weeping, his lips have lost the graceful smile of twenty. His whole countenance bears marks of combat and suffering, but, to make up for that, it is as it were transfigured under the action of divine grace and vividly reflects the beauty of a soul wholly angelic.

We have seen, from the opening of this history, that the Creator had enriched this soul with the most eminent qualities of mind, heart, and imagination, and early sown therein the seeds of the highest virtues. We have afterwards examined how S. Francis had cultivated those flowers of heaven called faith, hope, and charity, and how the Son of God had rewarded his fervent impulses by ever-growing graces. It remains for us to consider how this perpetual interchange between the Creator and the creature made Francis an exceptional being and one of the greatest souls God ever placed on earth.

The queen of virtues, the principle, the inspiration, and the support of all others, is the love of God, or, in Christian language, charity. It is that which gives birth to the other virtues as the stream comes from its source, the ray from its centre, and the plant from its root. It was so generous and glowing in S. Francis that the Churches and the people have called him the "Seraph of Assisi." He was interpenetrated with God, and, so to speak, completely transformed

into God, as the coal, thrown into the fire, absorbs its heat and glow.* It was this ardent charity that impelled him to court humiliations, to completely extinguish self and seek for the martyr's palm. It was that which threw him into long and profound ecstasies, or wrung from him burning words like these, "Lord, let the sweet violence of Your burning love detach me from everything under heaven and completely absorb me, so that I may die for the love of Your love since it is for the love of my love You have deigned to die." Here is a prayer he recited daily: "My God and my All! Who are You, O most gentle Lord, and who am I, Your servant, a poor worm? I would wish to love You, most holy Lord; I would wish to love You. O God of love, I have consecrated my heart and my body to You! If I could know how to do more for You I would do it, and I ardently desire it." His life was like a prelude of that heavenly life whose sole occupation is to love. "It wholly and perpetually ascended to God as a sacrifice of pleasing odour. He immolated his body by penitential rigours and his soul by the ardour of his desires." † In one of his ecstasies he heard our Lord say, "Francis, thy love approaches excess, madness! Thou expectest from Me impossibilities; no one ever asked Me for such favours." "O Lord, my sweetest love!" replied Francis, "is it for You to reproach me with this excess, You who, for love of me, wert annihilated, took flesh like ours, and loved us even to the folly of the Cross?" He would have his religious all love. They were astonished one day that he could endure the rigours of winter with such a poor habit. "Ah!" he cried, "if we felt within us the fire of divine love and a longing for our

* S. Bonaventure, chap. ix. † Ibid.

heavenly home, we would have no difficulty in bearing the external cold."

He unceasingly sought and pursued his Beloved, from whom he was only separated by the wall of his body; and he confessed to his companions that he found Him everywhere. Reverting to the primal origin of all things, and considering all creatures, even those that are not endowed with reason, as coming from the paternal hand of God, he called them, with ineffable tenderness, "his brothers and sisters." The impious see God nowhere; Francis saw Him everywhere.* All nature was to him like a transparent veil behind which God was hidden, as a harmonious harpsichord whose every note extolled the Divine perfections, as a magnificent work upon which the Most High had shed some rays of His infinite beauty,—everything spoke to him of God; and he, in turn, speaking to irrational creatures, alluringly invited them to join their voices to his in praising their common Lord and Master. Interpreter and worthy pontiff of nature, inheritor of the spirit of the prophets, he called upon all beings in creation to glorify God. Towards the close of the year 1224, having retired on account of his infirmities to a poor little cell near the monastery of San Damiano, he had an ecstasy in which the Spirit of God assured him of his eternal salvation, in pursuance of which he ordered Fra Leonardo, his compatriot, to take a pen and write. Then he entoned the *Canticle of the Sun*, a sublime improvisation which "the king of verses," Friar Pacificus, perhaps reduced to a more measured metre, and which the old chroniclers have handed down to us under the title of *Hymn of Creation*:—

* Thomas of Celano.

"Altissimo Signore, vostre sono le lodi, la gloria e gli onori, e a voi solo s'hanno a riferire tutte le grazie, e nessun'uomo è degno di nominarvi.

"Sia laudato Dio e esaltato, Signor mio, da tutte le creature ed in particolar dal sommo Sole, vostra fattura, Signore, il quale fa chiaro il giorno che c'illumina, onde per la sua bellezza e suo splendore, egli è vostra figura.

"Laudato sia il mio Signore dalla bianca Luna, e vaghe stelle, da voi nel ciel create lucenti e belle.

"Laudato sia il mio Signore dall 'aere e dai venti, dal sereno e dal nuvolo, e dai tutti gli altri tempi, per i quali vivono tutte quest 'altre basse creature.

"Laudato sia il mio Signore per l'acqua, elemento utilissimo a mortali, umile, casta e chiara.

"Laudato sia il mio Signore per il fuoco, da cui la notte viene illuminata nelle tenebre sue, perch 'egli è risplendente, allegro, vago e vigoroso.

"Laudato sia il mio Signore per la nostra madre terra, la quale ci sostenta e ci nutrisce col produrre diversità di erbe, fiori e frutti." *

* "To You, Most High Lord, belong praise, glory, honour; and to You alone all thanks are due, and no man is worthy to utter Your name.

"Praised and exalted be God, my Lord, by all creatures and particularly by the lofty sun, Your work, Lord, which makes the day luminous and by its beauty and splendour is a symbol of You.

"Praised be my Lord for the fair moon and the beauteous stars so luminous and beautiful, which He has placed in the firmament.

"Praised be my Lord by the air and the winds, by clear and cloudy weather, and by the other seasons in which all the lower animals live.

"Praised be my Lord for the humble, chaste, clear water, an element most useful to mortals.

"Praised be my Lord for the fire which dispels the darkness of

A few days after a conflict arose between the Bishop of Assisi and the municipal council of the town. Don Guido issued an interdict against them, and they replied by outlawing the prelate. Francis, grieved at such a dissension, added the following strophe to his canticle, which his Friars chanted in choir before both parties, and immediately peace was restored:—

"Laudato sia il mio Signore per quelli che perdonano per sua amore e sopportano i travagli con pazienza e le infirmità con allegrezza di spirito. Beati sono quei che in pace vivono, perchè saranno in cielo coronati!" *

Finally, when our Lord revealed to him in the convent of Foligno, that after two years' suffering he would be delivered from the prison of his body and transported to the sojourn of eternal rest, he finished his hymn of love with this cry of gratitude:—

"Laudato sia il mio Signore per la morte corporale, dalla quale nessun'uomo può fuggire. Guai a quelli che muoiono in peccato mortale, e beati quelli che nell'ora della morte si troveranno nella vostra grazia, per aver obbedito alla vostra santissima volontà, perchè non vedranno la seconda morte delle pene eterne!

"Laudate e rendete grazie al mio Signore, siategli grati e servitelo, voi tutte creature, con quella umiltà che dovete." †

night, because it is resplendent, cheerful, indomitable, and powerful.

"Praised be my Lord for our mother earth, which supports and nourishes us with its different productions, herbs, flowers, and fruits."

* "Praised be my Lord by those who forgive for the love of Him, and bear trials with patience and infirmities with spiritual joy. Blessed are those who live in peace, because they will be crowned in heaven!"

† "Praised be my Lord by corporal death which no man can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin, and blessed be those

Thus did the three divinely-inspired children, Ananias, Mizaël, and Azarias, walking in the midst of the flames of the Babylonian furnace as one walks in the balmy breeze of morning, entone their hymn of gratitude. The *Canticle of the Sun* is at once a hymn and a prayer. S. Francis desired his brethren should learn it and recite it daily. It is a very short poem; and yet the saint's whole soul, all the wealth of his imagination, all the boldness of his genius, have passed into his work, and we catch a breath as it were from that terrestial paradise of Umbria, where the skies are so golden and the land so full of flowers.

For our saint, inanimate nature reverted to the primitive plan of Providence, so sadly spoiled by sin. The flowers were to him like a smile from God; the stars in the firmament told him of the glory of the Omnipotent. "He invited rivers and seas, mountains and valleys, meadows and flocks, men and angels to praise their Creator; and he stood in the midst of this concert, like an inspired musician, concentrating in his soul all the sublime harmonies." *

All creatures, far from being an obstacle, were to him like so many steps by which he continually mounted to the throne of the Most High; and where others only saw perishable beauties he discovered, by a kind of second sight, the eternal relationships between the physical and the moral order, between the mysteries of nature and of faith. "His hours were sometimes

who at the hour of death shall be in Your grace, having obeyed Your most holy will, for they shall not see the second death of eternal punishment!

"Praise and thank my Lord; be grateful and serve Him with becoming humility, all you His creatures."—*Mark of Lisbon, Italian edition.*

* S. Bonaventure, chap. ix.; Thomas of Celano.

passed in praising the industry of the bees, and he who wanted everything gave them honey and wine in winter, so that they might not perish with the cold." *

He was fond of proposing the vigilance of the larks as a model for his disciples. Seeing one day a flight of those birds with ashen grey vesture like his, soar singing into the air as soon as they had picked up some grains from the earth, "Look at those sweet creatures," said he to his brethren. "They teach us how to give thanks to our common Father, who gives us our daily bread, to eat only for His glory, to despise the earth and soar to heaven where our conversation should be." The larks were his favourite birds; he praised their detachment from the earth, as he blamed the ants' excessive eagerness to provide for the winter.

One evening as he was going to rest in his hermitage on Alverno, he heard the nightingale's song. Delighted beyond measure, he begged his companion to alternately chant the praises of the Most High along with the bird. Brother Leo excusing himself on account of his bad voice, he began to make the responses to the winged chanter of the woods himself, and continued until an advanced hour of the night. The first to break down, he made the bird alight upon his hand, gently caressed it, congratulated it on having achieved the victory, and said to Brother Leo, "Let us give our brother the nightingale something to eat, for he deserves it more than I do." The nightingale ate some bits of bread out of the Father's hand, and fled away after getting his blessing. †

Next to the birds the saint dearly loved sheep and

* Ozanam. † Bernard of Besse.

lambs with a special affection, because they reminded him of the Lamb without spot immolated on Calvary for the redemption of men. When he met those inoffensive animals being led to the shambles, he wept tenderly, and would not go until he had redeemed them from death. One day, seeing a poor little sheep walking in the midst of a troop of goats, heaving a profound sigh, he said to his brethren, "It was thus our gentle Saviour Jesus walked in the midst of the Jews and Pharisees!" His companions resolved to buy the sheep; but they had no money and possessed nothing in the world but their cloaks. A dealer who was passing by, touched by their embarrassment, paid for the sheep and gave it to Francis. "At Our Lady of Angels they made him a present of a sheep which he received with delight. He warned his little favourite to be attentive in praising God and never to offend the brethren, and she faithfully obeyed her master's recommendations. As soon as she heard the religious chanting in choir, she trotted of her own accord to the church, went up to the altar of the Blessed Virgin and saluted the Mother of the true Lamb with her bleatings. At the moment when the priest elevated the sacred Host at Mass she bent her knees and bowed her head, as if to invite the faithful to come and adore their Creator, and reproach unbelievers for their irreverence towards the august Sacrament of our altars. During his sojourn in Rome in 1222 Francis always led about with him a little lamb. Before bidding adieu to the Eternal City, he gave this lamb in charge to his illustrious and pious friend, Giacomina di Settesoli. The little animal, as if it had been formed to spiritual exercises by the saint, became the inseparable companion of the noble lady, following her to the

church, remaining there and returning with her. If she were drowsy or less diligent in rising in the morning, it went to her bed, awakened her with its bleatings, and hastened her toilette, as if to remind her that the hour was come to go and serve God. Thus Giacomina, with an affection blended with admiration, took care of this marvellous lamb which, from being a disciple, had become her master in devotion." *

Let us not forget another detail which is only little in appearance; for nothing is little in the eyes of faith. Our saint carefully removed the worms he met on his way, for fear they would be crushed under the feet of the passers-by. Had not the Psalmist said of Christ, "I am a worm and no man"?

In the eyes of Francis inanimate creation had a language and a mystical meaning. He loved our sister water, because at baptism it conveys the blood of Jesus Christ; and when he was washing himself he sought out a place where, in dropping, it could not be dirtied. He revered in stones the symbol of Him who is the corner-stone of the Gospel; recommended his brethren when they were cutting wood on the mountain to let the strong branches alone, in memory of the Word Incarnate who was pleased to die for us on the wood of the Cross; and desired they should every season cultivate a bed of perfumed flowers in the convent garden, in memory of that mystical flower which grew from Jesse's root, and whose perfume gladdens the whole universe.

One of those happy expressions which often dropped from him seems to us to epitomise his whole thought on this subject. It will be remembered with what respect he picked up every scrap of writing left in the

* S. Bonaventure, chap. viii.

dust, for fear of treading under foot some passage that treated of God or the Divine perfections. One of his disciples asked him one day why he collected pagan writings with equal scrupulosity. "My son," he replied, "it is because I find therein letters composing the glorious name of the Lord; for the good those writings contain does not belong either to paganism or humanity, but to God alone, Author and Source of all good." * "And, in effect, what are all sacred and profane literatures but the characters with which God writes His name in the human mind, as He writes it in heaven with the stars?" †

Thus our saint, listening to the hidden harmonies of the globe, caused them to ascend to the throne of the Eternal. It is one of the most touching aspects of his character; all the historians have seized it, and have not failed to commemorate in Francis of Assisi a great lover of nature. Nothing could be more just; but we must not forget that he was only so because he was primarily one of the most fervent adorers of God that ever existed. When will our modern savants catch their inspiration from the same principles and the same spirit as the saints? When will they have the courage to break the iron chains in which a proud, false, and sterile science holds Truth captive? On that day—God grant it may be soon!—they will understand, like S. Francis, that creation is a sublime poem every syllable of which speaks to us of the adorable name of God!

That perfect charity which sees God in everything, that strong and constant charity which refers everything to God, was allied in Francis to the tenderest and simplest piety. With what devotional sentiments he

* Thomas of Celano. † Ozanam.

spoke of the mysteries of the Incarnation and birth of the Saviour! With what joy he greeted their annual recurrence! The Friars asked him one day if it was right to eat meat at Christmas when that feast fell on a Friday. "Assuredly," said he; "I would even wish that princes and the great ones of the earth strewed the country and the highroads with meat and cheese, in order that the birds and beasts of the field might have their share of so great a feast." It was S. Francis who popularised, perhaps even inaugurated, in Italy the devotion of the Crib. It was in 1223. Being at Rome he obtained the authorisation of the Sovereign Pontiff to go and celebrate the birth of the Saviour at Grecio, to assemble his brethren and the neighbouring populations, and give this feast unwonted *éclat*. He arrived on Christmas eve. His friend, Giovanni Velita, to whom he had entrusted the preparations, had followed his instructions to the letter. An altar erected in the open air, a crib, an ox, an ass, everything reproduced to the life the stable of Bethlehem. At midnight the Friars Minors wended their way to the wood, accompanied by a troop of mountaineers and peasants carrying lighted torches. It was a fairy sight to see those sheaves of light gleaming through the forest trees and hear those charming Umbrian Christmas carols choired by the processionists and repeated by the mountain echoes. Francis could not refrain from shedding tears of joy. At Mass he filled the office of deacon, chanted the Gospel with accustomed solemnity, and then preached on the greatness and mercy of the Messiah, whom he lovingly called the Child of Bethlehem. Every time he came to the name of Jesus he was obliged to stop; his voice faltered as if he had

tasted a delicious honey, or heard a hidden melody the notes of which he wished to catch. The Cavaliere Giovanni Velita, a trustworthy man who had abandoned the career of arms the better to serve Jesus Christ, affirmed on oath that he saw a child seemingly asleep over whom our saint bent, covering him with kisses and as it were awakening him from his slumbers. The straw the apparition had touched subsequently operated several miraculous cures.*

The joy with which the faithful applauded the holy Patriarch's pious institution is indescribable. S. Clare was one of the most eager to introduce this touching custom, which consists in representing the stable of Bethlehem and the birth of the Saviour in the churches during Christmas, into all the convents of her Order. She herself, following point by point the institutions and example of her blessed Father, superintended the preparations. It was to her inexpressibly delightful to lay the infant Jesus in His cradle, to mingle her voice with the canticles of the angels before the lighted crib, and meditate on the infinite loveliness of the Word-made-flesh. Her piety merited for her a favour that still further increased this nascent devotion, and which Bernard of Besse, with touching fidelity, has described in detail. The convent of S. Damien's was preparing to celebrate the great feast of Christmas. All the sisters were there; Clare alone, a prey to chronic fevers and acute pains and obliged to keep her bed, saw herself deprived of the double happiness she had tasted in years gone by, of chanting matins of the Nativity along with her sisters, and partaking of the Blood of the Lamb without spot.

* After the death of S. Francis, they built a chapel on the site of the miraculous crib.

We forbear depicting her affliction; for, to measure its extent, one should love as she loved the Virgin's heavenly Spouse. When her daughters went down to the chapel at midnight to recite the canonical office, she could not restrain her grief. "O most gentle Master!" she cried, "see my affliction! My companions are celebrating Your birth in harmonious Christmas hymns; they are going to gather round Your cradle and chant Your praises. I alone will be deprived of those delights!" He who hears the least cry of the least of His creatures did not remain deaf to the loving plaints of His servant. Clare was suddenly transported into the church of the Sacro Convento: was it in spirit or in reality? She could not account for it. However it was, her ears distinctly heard the Friars Minors chanting, her eyes gazed upon the adorable Infant of Bethlehem on the altar, and her lips received the Bread of Life under the white eucharistic veils. When the office in the chapel of S. Damien's was over, the religious hurried to the invalid and said all in one breath, "O mother, what a delightful night! What torrents of heavenly joy have inundated our souls! Oh that you were there in the midst of your daughters!" "Cease your lamentations, my dear sisters," replied the pious abbess, "and join me in blessing our Divine Master who has not abandoned His poor little servant." And when she had related the signal favour of which she had been the object, "Sisters," she added, "rejoice with me, and let us together praise the Redeemer of men, and our seraphic Father, S. Francis, the One for having granted, the other for having obtained it." *

The devotion of the Crib, zealously propagated by

* Bernard of Besse.– *Chronicle.*

the children of S. Francis, has long become a universal devotion; but it is nowhere invested with more charming simplicity than in the convents of the Seraphic Order, particularly at the Ara-Cœli.*

Our saint strove to imbibe as much as possible the spirit of the different mysteries the Church celebrates in the course of the year. During Lent he accompanied her in spirit to the summit of Calvary, and often let fall from his lips that exclamation of the Doctor of the Gentiles, "*Dilexit me, et tradidit semetipsum pro me.*" † He loved the fine language of our holy Books; he pondered over it and studied it to its depths, until his soul was full of it; and we can have no doubt that it helped to make him a saint, and a great saint; God so lives in each of His words, each word is so luminous, so fertile, so powerful!—it is like a consecrated Host and contains the whole Word, given to those who take it to heart.

During Holy Week Francis's fervour redoubled. He thought of nothing but Jesus crucified; spoke of nothing but the wounds, humiliations, and death of Jesus; and S. Bonaventure tells us that at the sole remembrance of the Passion his soul poured itself out in tears of love and sorrow. He might have said to his brethren with as much truth as S. Bernard, "From the first moment of my conversion I made a bouquet of myrrh, composed of the bitterness and sufferings of my Saviour, to make up for the merits I

* A convent given to the Friars Minors by Pope Innocent IV. (1250). It was the ancient Capitol of Pagan Rome. Before the suppression of the religious Orders in Italy, thousands of men thronged from afar to be present at the celebrated procession of the "Bambino," a statuette of the infant Jesus made of olive-wood from the garden of Gethesmani, and covered with gold, diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, and topaz.

† Galat. ii.

did not possess. I have put it in my bosom, and no one shall snatch it from me; I have placed all my perfection, all my riches in it, and found there all my consolation. It is that which appeases the anger of my Judge and makes me imitate my God. You know I often speak of the Passion of Jesus Christ; and God is my witness that I bear Him in my heart. My science is to know Jesus and Jesus crucified." Sometimes, saddened by men's insensibility, he traversed mountains and valleys and awakened the echoes all round, crying out, "Weep, hills! Weep, mountains! Rocks, rend yourselves; valleys, heave bitter sighs! And thou, privileged people, Sion, Catholic Church, rend thy garments and thy heart, and cover thy head with ashes; for Love is not loved!" And the echoes took up the sad refrain, "*L'Amore non è amato! L'Amore non è amato!*" A cavalier one day, overhearing these lamentations, approached the saint and said, "What are you weeping for? What can I do to console you?" "My Love is crucified," replied Francis, sobbing; "and if you wish to console me, let us weep together over His dolorous Passion." Another time in the midst of the indescribable sufferings of his closing years, when his brethren begged him to mention some book the reading of which might soothe his pains, he made them this beautiful response, "Brethren, there is no book delights me more than the remembrance of the Passion of Jesus Christ; it is the continual subject of my meditations; and even if I were to live to the end of time, I would have no need of any other reading." "God forbid," he cried with S. Paul, "that I should glory in anything but the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!"* This cry of the Apostle often rose

* Galat. vi. 14.

to his lips, and on that account the Friars Minors have chosen it as the device on their coat of arms.

Our saint never separated the love of Jesus crucified from the love of Jesus in the Sacred Host, ever living in the most holy Sacrament of the altar. He heard Mass every day and frequently communicated, and exhorted all his spiritual children, even tertiaries, to follow his example. It was beautiful to see him at the moment of communion approach the holy table, with downcast eyes, clasped hands, and bare feet, out of respect for so great a mystery! It was to the congregation one of the most delightful spectacles, and no one witnessed it without being moved to deeper devotion. When Francis had received the God of his heart, he withdrew to some retired spot absorbed in a kind of spiritual inebriation and rapt in ecstasy.

He was never tired of contemplating the Sacred Host. Kneeling before the altar, penetrating the cloud of the eucharistic veil, and plunging at will into that ocean of light, that furnace of love, which faith reveals to us, he passed the greater portion of his days in secret colloquy with his God. The hours then fled by too rapidly to satisfy his heart's desires, and the morning's dawn almost always surprised him in this sweet converse which he regretfully broke off. A friend of his, a man of the world, unable to understand such fervour, put this question to him one day, "Pray tell me, Father, what do you do during those long hours at the foot of the blessed Sacrament?" "My son," replied the saint, "I ask thee, in turn, what does the pauper do at the rich man's door, the sick man in presence of his physician, the thirsty man at a limpid spring? What they do, I do before the eucharistic God: I pray, I adore, I love!"—"I pray, I adore, I

love!"—the whole life of S. Francis is in those three words.

He could not endure the churches where the adorable Eucharist reposed being badly kept, and, if necessary, undertook to clean them himself. For fear the altar bread should run out or be badly made, he was accustomed on his missions to take an artistically cut mould to the poor parish churches.* It was also on account of the Eucharist he had a singular veneration for priests, which has become traditional in his Order.

How describe his devotion to the saints!—S. Michael, chief of the angelic militia; S. Peter and S. Paul, the princes of the apostles; and above all Mary, the Blessed Mother of God, whom he had chosen as his advocate and patroness of his Order? He fasted in honour of one or other every year.

This pure, inexhaustible love, that filled the soul of Francis, and flowed directly from the Heart of Jesus, did not remain idle; it poured itself out over all creation, like an overflowing river, more particularly upon the disinherited of this world (and they are always the greater number) and even blasphemers and unbelievers. How often the saint's unchangeable meekness cured hearts ulcerated by hatred or grief! How often he reconciled them with Heaven, with themselves, and with society! Let us leave the *Legend of the Three Companions* relate one of these victories. One day as he was going from Assisi to Perugia he met a peasant whose countenance betrayed his anger, and who was giving vent to all sorts of curses against his landlord, whom he accused of having robbed him of everything. The servant of God drew nigh, and,

* Some of these moulds were preserved as relics, and were to be seen at the convent of Grecio before the great revolution.

seeing him persist in his sentiments of hatred and revenge, deeply compassionated the state of his soul. "Brother," said he with angelical meekness, "pray, for the love of God, forgive thy lord, that thy soul may be saved." "*I* forgive him!" replied the man; "I cannot if he does not give me back what he robbed from me." "Stay!" resumes the saint, "I give thee this cloak, it is all I have; I beg thee, in return, forgive thy lord for the love of God." At the same time he divests himself of his mantle and gives it to the poor peasant, who, touched by such kindness and vanquished by such love, abjures every sentiment of hatred and forgives his landlord.

S. Francis so far compassionated the sufferings of others as to weep with those who wept, to work miracles if necessary, as at Trabe-Bonata, where he changed water into wine for the workmen who were dying of thirst (1215). Nevertheless his kind-heartedness was nowhere more admirable than in regard of his brethren. With what charity he strove to solace them either in their interior pains or corporal sufferings! His affection for them was only equalled by his severity to himself.

One night a young religious, tortured by hunger and sleeplessness, began to groan and at last cried out, "I am dying with the hunger!" On hearing this exclamation the blessed Father gets up, lays the table and sits down with the poor Friar and all the other religious, so that he might not be shamed by eating by himself. After the repast he said to his brethren, "Verily I tell you, every one ought to measure his strength and take his necessary nourishment, so that the body may render good and loyal service to the spirit. Let us beware of either excess; we must not

eat too much, which would injure body and soul, nor fast immoderately, because the Lord prefers works of mercy to the purely exterior observance of religion. For our part, dear brethren, it is out of charity towards our brother we have eaten along with him, and not through caprice or necessity." *

He was equally condescending to Friar Sylvester, one of his twelve first companions, whose health was being undermined by debility. Knowing that Sylvester had a great longing for grapes but would not venture to ask for them, he led him to an adjoining vineyard, sat down alongside him next to a vine stock, plucked a bunch, blessed it, and shared with the invalid. God blessed the Father's delicate charity. As soon as Sylvester had eaten his share he was perfectly cured.

A last trait, still more affecting, will give the finishing-touch to the holy Patriarch's paternal fondness for his brethren. Fra Rigero of Bologna, who merited the title of Blessed, was for a time a prey to the most horrible of temptations, despair: he thought he was abandoned by God and that the saint consequently avoided him. At last, when his strength and courage failed him, he said to himself one day, "I will arise and go to my Father. If he receives me with kindness I shall hope the Sovereign Lord will be propitious to me; if he acts otherwise, it will be a sign God has rejected me for ever." He immediately set out for the episcopal palace of Assisi, where Francis, almost at the last extremity, was then receiving the attentions of his august protector. The saint, knowing by revelation his disciple's state of mind and the cause of his journey, deputed Friars Leo and Masseo to meet him.

* Bernard of Besse.

"Go," he said—"go and meet Brother Rigero, who is coming to see me. Embrace him for me, and tell him that of all my brethren he is the one I love most tenderly." Leo and Masseo fulfilled their commission like true obedient sons; and Fra Rigero, instantaneously confirmed in the faith, felt interpenetrated with ineffable confidence and joy. As soon as he entered the saint's room, the latter, languishing as he was, rose from his bed, ran to meet him, and, most affectionately embracing him, said, "My dear son, of all my brethren in the world I love you from the bottom of my heart." Then kissing his disciple's forehead and making the sign of the cross thereon, he added, "God has permitted this temptation for the greater good of thy soul; but since it seems too painful to thee, thou shalt henceforth have neither trial nor temptation." From that hour, Rigero, in effect, recovered his interior peace and joy, never more to lose them.*

Francis counted among his disciples men who were superior to him in learning or oratorical talent, such as Brother Elias, Alexander of Hales, and S. Anthony of Padua—he knew it; but far from being jealous of their success, as happens to proud or narrow minds, he warmly congratulated them, and, embracing them with hearty effusion, did not hesitate to say, "Brethren, the good news you tell me gives me joy like unto that one feels when he breathes the good odours wafted from meadows and blossoming vineyards."

The sublimest effect of divine charity is to offer pardon to the guilty in order to save them. Our saint, imitating as far as he could the Saviour's infinite mercy, recommended the ministers of the Order to use the same condescension towards their subjects. He went

* Thomas of Celano.

so far as to write to Peter of Catana, then Vicar-General (1221):—

"May the Lord be thy defence, and preserve thee in His holy love. I recommend thee to bring such patience to the government of thy brethren that, if one of them was so audacious as to strike thee, thou shouldst receive this bad treatment as a grace. Love those who treat thee thus, and purpose, by loving them, to make them better; but do not hope to convert them unless God gives His grace. Here is the sign by which I shall recognise that thou lovest God and hast affection for me His servant and thine: it is that none of our brethren, however guilty he may be, leaves thee without experiencing the effects of thy kindness. And if he does not ask pardon for his fault, forestall him and offer him his pardon; and if he should present himself a thousand times before thee, always show more affection for him than thyself, to lead him back to the good way. And let not the rest of the brethren throw his fault in his face and publish it on the house-tops, but keep it secret and cover their brother with the mantle of charity. For it is not those who are in health that need a physician but those who are ill. Do what I have told thee. Farewell."

After reading these pages, one asks if a mother herself could have more love, more consideration, for her children. It was thus the amiable Francis first put in practice that counsel he taught in Chapter VI. of his Rule: "If a mother nurtures and loves her son according to the flesh, with how much more affection ought not each of us to love and nourish his brother according to the spirit?"

And as the holy patriarch had only the spiritual progress of his disciples in view, and as the essen-

tial of sanctity is a sovereign hatred of evil, as well as a perfect love of good, he uttered this terrible malediction against the rebellious and impenitent violators of the Rule: "Most Holy Father, may they be accursed of You, of all Your heavenly court, and of me, the least of Your servants, those who by their scandals labour to demolish that edifice You have raised with Your hands and never cease to sustain by the ministry of exemplary religious!"

CHAPTER XVI.

VIRTUES OF S. FRANCIS (*continued*): OBEDIENCE, CHASTITY, POVERTY, HUMILITY, MORTIFICATION—GIFT OF PRAYER—EMPIRE OVER NATURE.

DIVINE charity is a queen who is never without her retinue; she has all the other virtues as daughters and companions; and when she reigns in a heart like Francis's one must expect to see her surrounded by a train the most resplendent in the supernatural order. Let us say a word as to the religious virtues of our saint, and with a few touches of the pencil complete the portrait of his beautiful soul.

Who could depict his zeal in the practice of obedience? Although founder and invested by the Sovereign Pontiffs with the Generalship for life, we see him always anxious to obey. In his travels, he cedes the command to one of his companions, and from the day he placed the supreme power in the hands of Peter of Catana submits with a childlike simplicity to Angelo of Rieti, his Guardian. Towards the close of his life

he is heard to confidentially declare to one of his disciples, "I have received from on high this grace among others, that if they assigned me as Guardian a novice who had only been an hour in the Order, I would obey him as easily and as punctually as the oldest religious."

The reader remembers the love of predilection he had vowed, from the first awakening of passion to the beautiful virtue of purity, which grew with his growth. This lovely virtue, which enables us to lead the lives of angels in mortal flesh, so shone through him that it wrings this cry of admiration from Thomas of Celano: "How beautiful it was to see with the innocence of his morals, the candour of his soul and the angelic purity of his look!" "Convinced that chastity is like a delicate flower that a breath may sully, he recommended his brethren to keep a strict watch over their senses, their imagination, and their relations with the opposite sex, and he showed them the example. He was so modest that he could confidentially assure his companions that he never raised his eyes to a woman."*

It will be recollected what a faithful and impassioned lover of evangelical poverty he was. We have little to add to what we have already said on this point. Francis so esteemed this virtue as to weep when he met a beggar worse dressed than himself, strip himself of his only mantle to cover the shoulders of the poor, and even give away the breviary the Friars used in reciting the canonical office as he had nothing else to give. One day having overheard one of his religious say in a low tone, "I have come from Francis's cell," he sent for him and said, "Why do you call it *my* cell? It is not mine, and henceforth another shall

* S. Bonaventure, chap. v.

occupy it." Then he added, "Our Lord when He was in the desert, where He passed forty days and forty nights in fasting and prayer, built neither a house nor a cell for Himself, but took His rest in the cleft of a rock or on the ridge of a mountain." * How fine to see Francis at the point of death give this consoling testimony of himself, "I never remember having been untrue to my Lady Poverty!"

His incomparable humility is not less astonishing. Perhaps no man aroused more enthusiasm; none evinced greater self-contempt, indifference to honours, or love of humiliations. The more they exalted him, the deeper he sank into his own nothingness. "Let us quit this place," said he one day to his companion; "we have nothing to gain with the honours these good people pay us. Let us go elsewhere and seek the contempt of men; for that is more profitable to us." It was out of humility and after a vision he had had that he stopped at the threshold of the priesthood, and always remained deacon. At the moment when he was consulting the Lord in prayer on this subject, an angel appeared, and, showing him a vessel full of water clearer than crystal, said, "Look, Francis, the priest's soul should be still purer." †

We cannot resist the pleasure of acquainting our readers with two charming instances of humility which we take from S. Bonaventure and Bernard of Besse. Here is the first: It was in the year 1220, on his return from the mission in the East. Succumbing to fatigue on the long way from Bologna to Perugia, our saint was obliged to mount an ass, when a very natural reflection occurred to his companion, Fra Leonardo

* *Legend of the Three Companions.*
† Mark of Lisbon.

of Assisi, who, thinking of former times, was toiling after him. "Formerly," said he to himself, "my family took the *pas* of his. Now our positions are reversed: it is he who uses a nag, and I who follow on foot." Hardly had this interior murmur arisen in his mind, when the saint, who was so largely endowed from on high with the gift of reading hearts, alighted from his nag, and said to his compatriot, "You are right, my son. It is not fitting I should travel thus and leave you to walk; for you were nobler and more influential than I was in the world." The Friar, surprised and confounded at being discovered, threw himself upon his knees before his blessed Father, to humbly confess his fault with tears in his eyes; and Francis graciously forgave him, without the slightest tinge of censure or acerbity.*

About the same time, we think, Fra Masseo of Marignano tested and verified the saint's extreme humility. As he was returning from the wood adjoining Portiuncula, whither he was wont to retire, the easier to hold converse with God, he ran out to meet him, and, without any preamble, put the following question to him, "Why, Father, why *you* more than any one else?" The holy founder, who loved him as one of his most fervent disciples and one of the columns of his Order, was by no means offended at the freedom with which Masseo spoke. Quite the contrary, he calmly replied as he quietly walked back to the monastery, "Speak, my son; what do you mean?" "I mean," replied the Friar, "why are they all running after *you?* Why do they hunger and thirst to see you, to hear you, to put themselves under your guidance? You are not a handsome man, nor

* S. Bonaventure.

a renowned *savant*, nor a baron of high lineage. Once more, how is it that they are all running after *you?*" The saints have their way of hearing the truth; very far from being galled or getting angry like worldlings, they receive the comments of others with undissembled joy, as might have been observed, on this occasion, on the seraphic Father's countenance. His brow, instead of darkening, grew radiant and luminous. Suddenly he stopped, and, raising his eyes to heaven, kept them long fixed upon an invisible Being, unable to remove them, as if they had encountered Him whom he chanted in his verses as the God of his heart and the only object of his love. What passed during that ecstasy? What was the mysterious dialogue between the servant and the Sovereign Master? It is God's secret. Only Masseo remarked that the saint's countenance betrayed extraordinary emotion, and his glance reflected a divine light. He was not terrified, nor did he strive to get away; for he knew the Father was subject to these raptures.

As soon as the man of God came to himself, he prostrated himself with his face to the earth, watered the ground with his tears, and returned thanks to the Most High with unspeakable fervour of spirit. Then rising and turning to his companion, "My son," said he, "you want to know why they are all running after me? Here is the key to this enigma. The Lord, whose eye is always upon the good and bad, has not observed among so many millions of men any sinner viler than me, and more incapable of bringing about the general reformation He was contemplating; that is why His glance rested upon me. Yes, He has chosen a senseless man to confound the world's wisdom, and weakness and nothingness to confound nobility,

power, and grandeur. And what is the teaching of that, if not that all good as well as all virtue comes from Him and not from creatures, that no flesh should glory in His sight, and that if any one glories, he ought to glory in the Lord to whom alone belongs the glory for ever and ever?" A beautiful response, all luminous with Gospel light, and worthy of such a great saint! Friar Masseo, like Friar Pacificus, went away satisfied: he had learned for certain that his blessed Father had laid the foundation of his sanctification on the immovable rock of Christian humility.*

Mortification of the senses completed the work begun by humility. He treated his body as we treat an enemy, only giving it what he could not deny it. He often sprinkled his food with ashes, excusing himself by saying that his sister ashes was chaste. He never drank anything but water, and hardly enough of that to slake his thirst. One day they asked him what was the reason of such austerity of life. "Because," he replied, "it is difficult to satisfy the needs of the body without inclining to sensuality." Before breathing his last he thought it right, like S. Bernard, to ask pardon of Brother Ass, that is to say, his poor body, for having treated it so severely.

It is the characteristic of saints to reconcile virtues apparently the most opposite. This lover of penitence was of a singularly amiable, gentle, and cheerful disposition.

However superficially we may study his virtues, we cannot refrain from admiring in him the rarest commingling of greatness and modesty, heroism and simplicity; and then we cease to be astonished that the Creator, finding a soul so docile to His inspirations,

* Bernard of Besse.

should have enriched it with the most precious gifts, such as discernment of hearts, the spirit of prophecy, and power over demons, diseases, and death. For our part we admire those heavenly favours; but there is a gift which seems to us still more preferable, and which is without contradiction more excellent and meritorious, the gift of prayer. Francis possessed it in the sublimest degree. It is rare to find in the same person the contemplative life of Mary and the active life of Martha; one almost always dominates at the expense of the other. It is the privilege of the holy Patriarch of Assisi to have united both, and, so to speak, made them go hand in hand. His action was so universal, he raised up so many apostles, traversed so many countries, worked so many miracles and converted so many sinners, that it seems as if he could have had no time for prayer. He prayed with perseverance, ardour, and tears, had so many raptures, ecstasies, and loving colloquies with the Saviour, poured out his soul in so many hymns of love and gratitude, that it seems he could have done nothing else. Still, if we must make a choice and decide which predominated, prayer or the apostolate, we incline to the former, basing our estimate on the irresistible taste and attraction he had for it. Thomas of Celano and S. Bonaventure tell us with what diligence he turned this gift of God to account. Prayer was the groundwork of his existence, his breath of life, the spiritual ladder by which he went from men to God and from God to men. It was to it he attributed all his success in preaching and all his progress in virtue; it was it, in fact, that raised him so rapidly to perfect union with God in love. Consequently he was extraordinarily attentive, wherever he was, to the visits and promptings of the Holy Spirit,

and recommended his brethren to be specially desirous of the spirit of prayer. "A true Friar Minor," said he, "is above all a man of prayer, as our convents are above all houses of prayer. Without prayer no one can obtain certain special graces from God, nor make serious progress in virtue." More than once his companions saw him rapt in ecstasy, motionless, with countenance transfigured, eyes fixed on the heavens, or again raised several cubits above the ground, and environed with a luminous cloud. "During those long raptures the Most High revealed to him great secrets which the blessed Father treasured in his heart, unless the glory of God or the good of souls made it a duty to divulge them." *

One evening a religious, not finding him in his cell, thought he must be in the neighbouring grove and flies thither at once. As soon as he enters the wood he hears the saint sending up sighs and supplications to heaven for the conversion of sinners, and conjuring the Queen of Angels to show him her adorable Son. The religious, advancing, perceives, in the midst of a supernatural light, the Virgin Mother with enchanting graciousness placing her Son in the arms of Francis, and the happy Patriarch, like the aged Simeon, receiving the Infant Jesus, adoring and caressing Him and entreating Him to forgive poor sinners and save them. At the sight of such a prodigy the Friar falls to the ground, half dead, such is the instinctive fear of God in fallen man! The saint, returning to the monastery for Matins, found him in that state and revived him, forbidding him to speak of what he had seen and heard; but the religious, believing that in this instance the glory of God required him to speak rather than

* S. Bonaventure, chap. x.

keep silence, hastened to relate the marvellous scene he had witnessed.

Another time, a novice whom the saint had just received and was taking to the novitiate, had recourse to a very ingenious means of finding out what he was doing during the night. Delayed on the way, they were obliged to lie on the bare ground in the open country to snatch a little repose. Seeing the Father asleep, the young man joined the end of his cord to S. Francis's, "so that," as he said, "he could not move without my knowing it." Then, satisfied with his little stratagem, he tranquilly lay down and was soon asleep. A few hours after, Francis, awaking, saw the trick, quietly undid the knot and went to pray under some trees that stood hard by. The novice, on awaking, amazed at not seeing the Father by his side, starts off in search of him. An extraordinary light, gleaming through the trees, indicates the presence of the saint. He directs his steps thither, and soon finds himself confronted by a spectacle which human language is powerless to describe. The Son of God, surrounded by heavenly spirits, His most holy Mother, S. John the Baptist and S. John the Evangelist, were there holding familiar converse with Francis. Astonishing to relate, the same supernatural phenomenon twice produces the same effect. This young man, like the religious of whom we have previously spoken, was seized with dread, and lost consciousness until our saint, warned by the Saviour Himself, recalled him to life. Meanwhile the heavenly vision disappeared, and, as usual, Francis forbade the novice to speak of it. More obedient than the other Friar, the novice waited for the saint's death to reveal his secret.*

* Bernard of Besse.

God, who is the master of His gifts and distributes them as He pleases to His creatures, does not wish that one should indiscreetly or without a motive disturb the operations of His grace. One day the Bishop of Assisi alighted at the convent of Portiuncula, and, hearing no noise, half-opened the door of Francis's cell, with the secret desire of surprising him in an ecstasy, but felt suddenly repelled by an invisible arm and flung far away, and did not recover the full use of his senses until he had candidly confessed his indiscretion in presence of the religious.

By dint of tears and prayers, love and humility, the son of Bernardone had recovered primordial innocence, and with it, apparently, the privileges our first parents enjoyed on the day of their creation. He was perfectly subject to God; and the lower animal creation, in turn, reverting to sin-destroyed order, was so docile to his voice, that to discover similar obedience we must go back to the golden age of the terrestrial paradise. No doubt several saints before him had more or less resumed the sceptre fallen from the hands of Adam: the Fathers of the Thebaid were tended by lions and ravens; S. Gall commanded the Alpine bears; S. Colombanus, passing through the forest of Luxeuil, was gladdened by the songs of birds, and saw the squirrels come down from the trees and alight upon his hand; but none of them equalled the Penitent of Assisi. Francis wielded that ancient empire of man over nature, not occasionally, but in an habitual and complete manner. When he emerged from the Convent of Our Lady of Angels to traverse the plains of Umbria, the animals greeted him as king of creation. Seeing but the Divine imprint upon that worn face, wherein there was hardly anything earthy,

and no longer feeling that instinctive horror inspired by our fallen and ferocious condition, they thronged round the saint to admire and serve him. Hares and rabbits took refuge in the folds of his habit. If he crossed some pasture land, the sheep, hearing themselves greeted by the sweet name of sisters, raised their heads and ran towards him, to the amazement of the wondering shepherds. Long detached from the joys of human companionship, he was pleased with the attentions of these denizens of the fields.

On the borders of the Lake of Rieti a fisherman offered him a live river-bird which Francis willingly accepted, held some time in his hands, and then left at liberty. But the bird did not fly away. The saint, in a transport of gratitude and love towards God, raised his eyes to heaven and remained for more than an hour in ecstasy. On coming to, he blessed his little brother bird, and commanded him to regain the fields of ether to sing the praises of the Creator; and immediately the bird flapped his wings, took to flight, and began to warble joyously.

On the same lake a boatman presented him one day with a big fish he had just caught. Francis held the fish for some time and then put it back into the water; but, instead of escaping, it remained in the same place, sporting on the surface of the water in presence of the saint, as if it could not tear itself away from him, and only plunged to the bottom of the lake at his command and after receiving his benediction.*

Another time meeting on the road to Siena a young man who was going to sell some live turtle-doves, "My dear son," said Francis to him, "don't deliver up to death those innocent birds which are in Scripture

* S. Bonaventure, chap. viii.

the symbol of chaste, humble, faithful souls; pray, give them to me." The young man having given them to him very readily, Francis cherished and caressed them in his bosom, and speaking to them as if they could understand him, said, "Innocent and chaste doves, why do you let yourselves be caught? But I will rescue you from captivity and death, and build you nests where you can increase and multiply." "Hearken, my son," he added, turning to the young man, "here is the reward God reserves for the generous act thou hast just done. Thou wilt shortly put on the penitential habit, and find along with us in the treasure of voluntary poverty the pledge of eternal beatitude." This prediction was literally verified, and the young man, having entered the Order of Friars Minors, died therein in the odour of sanctity. Francis, after giving him his blessing, pursued his way, carrying the gentle doves to the monastery of Ravacciano under the walls of Siena. On reaching the convent he struck his staff into the ground. The next morning the staff had become a large green oak to the amazement of the Friars and Sienese; and Francis placed the dear little doves there, commanding them to build their nests therein and remain in peace. They obeyed, and got on so well with the religious that they came to eat familiarly out of their hands. S. Francis's miraculous oak still stood up to the beginning of the eighteenth century.

At the convent of Monte Colombo there was a nest of crested larks whose mother daily visited Francis to receive the food for her little ones from his hands; and when they had wings brought her whole covey. Francis remarked that the strongest of the little larks pecked at the others and seized on their portion. He was annoyed at it, and addressing the culprit as if it

was endowed with understanding, "Cruel and insatiable bird," said he, "thou wilt die miserably, and the most ravenous animals will not taste thy flesh." A few days afterwards she was actually drowned in a vessel they were given to drink out of, and they threw her to the cats and dogs to see if they would eat her, but not one of them would touch her.

On his return from Syria, our saint, traversing the Venetian lagunes, saw before him a numerous flock of singing-birds. "Our brothers the birds are praising God," said he to his companion; "let us recite the Divine Office among them." But as the warbling of the birds prevented them from hearing each other, he turned to them and said, "My brothers the birds, stop your singing until we have paid the tribute of our praises to God." They immediately stopped, and did not resume their noisy chirping until the saint gave them permission.*

Preaching in the village of Alviano, and unable to make himself heard on account of the swallows whose nests were hard by, he said, "My sister swallows, you have spoken long enough. Let me speak now. Listen to the Word of God, and keep silent while I am preaching." They did not utter the least sound nor even move their wings. S. Bonaventure, from whom we take these interesting details, adds that in his time a young Paris student, disturbed in his studies by the twittering of a swallow, said to his fellow-students, "This is doubtless one of those babblers that disturbed the blessed Francis during his sermon and whom he silenced;" and, turning to the swallow, he said, "In the name of S. Francis, I order thee to keep silent and come to me." She stopped and came to him. The

* S. Bonaventure.

scholar was so surprised at this prodigy that he remained motionless and never thought of retaining it. The bird fled away and never afterwards annoyed him.*

At the convent of S. Mary of Angels, a grasshopper was chirping on a fig-tree near Francis's cell. He called it, and it immediately alighted upon his hand. "Sister grasshopper," said he, "chirp and praise the Lord." Forthwith it began to chirp, and only desisted at the bidding of the saint; remaining thus for eight days, going and coming from its fig-tree to Francis. At the expiration of that time he said to his companions, "Our little sister grasshopper has long enough invited us to praise God; let us give her leave to go." At that very moment she went away and never came back.†

Later, a falcon, whose eyrie was near the saint's grotto on Monte Alverno, became singularly attached to him, and constituted itself, so to speak, his night-watcher. When the hour for matins came, he never failed to sing at Francis's door and awaken him long before dawn. If the saint was weaker than usual, the intelligent bird waited until sunrise and sang low.‡

During his latter years, while he was at Siena, a cavalier sent him a beautiful pheasant. As soon as this charming little creature had seen the servant of God and heard his voice, it conceived such an affection for him that it never left him. They often took it to the vineyards to set it at liberty; it quickly fled back to the Seraphic Father. They gave it to a signor who was very fond of Francis and often came to visit him; it would take no food. Brought back to the saint, it

* S. Bonaventure, chap. xii.
† *Id.*, chap. viii ‡ *Ibid.*

manifested its joy by its cries and flapping its wings, and began to eat with an appetite.*

Often when Francis quitted Assisi at dawn to go and preach to the people, he began by inviting all creatures to sing along with him the praises of the Eternal. "Little flowers, my sisters," said he to the anemones of the woods, the daisies of the fields, and the violets of the meadows, "salute with me the Author of nature;" and the little flowers immediately bent their stems, swung their corolla like golden censers, and poured out the perfumes of their hearts before God. "Grasshoppers, turtle-doves, and warblers, my sisters," he continued, "let us together adore Him who has given us life;" and grasshoppers, turtle-doves, and garden warblers entoned their hymn of love and gratitude in honour of the Omnipotent.

The wild beasts themselves felt drawn towards the humble penitent of Assisi; in him they respectfully recognised a reflection of the primitive power of Adam and the ideal beauty of the Creator, and in his presence lost all their ferocity. The reader recollects the conversion of the wolf of Gubbio. One day, as the saint was going from Cotanello to Grecio, he promised his guide that the wolves that infested the mountain and environs would not injure them. Reassured by this promise, the peasant conducted him as far as Grecio; on his return, as he was entering the gorges of the mountain, two wolves emerged from the forest, drew nigh, licked his feet, and followed him home as a dog follows his master. The inhabitants of Grecio, having heard of the arrival of the celebrated thaumaturgist, came to entreat him with tears to deliver them from the double scourge that afflicted them, the wolves and hail-

* S. Bonaventure, chap. viii.

storms. Moved to compassion, Francis said, "For the honour and glory of the Omnipotent God, I promise you that if you bring forth fruits worthy of penance these calamities will disappear; but, at the same time, I predict that if you repay the benefits of God with ingratitude, or imitate the dog returning to his vomit, the Eternal will be enraged against you and double the chastisement." The people publicly engaged to do penance, and Heaven undertook to execute the other part of the contract. As long as they remained faithful to their promise, neither the wolves decimated their flocks nor the hail devastated their harvests.*

But we must stop. If we were to relate all the scenes of this kind scattered through the saint's life, we would never have done. We have said enough to enable our readers to lift a corner of the veil that hides the hand of God, to catch a glimpse of that infinite goodness that calls wretched creatures to a share in His perfections, and to grasp one of the most impenetrable mysteries of redemption, the deliverance of nature. This deliverance S. Paul clearly announces in his Epistle to the Romans. "For the expectation of the creature," he writes, "waiteth for the revelation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him that made it subject, in hope; because the creature also itself shall be delivered from the servitude of corruption, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God."† That is what the Apostle teaches. Is it astonishing, after that, that creatures who groan under the yoke of sinners, should rejoice at the sight of the saints who are inaugurating their deliverance? Is it astonish-

* S. Bonaventure, chap. viii.
† Rom. viii.

ing that the lions and bears of the amphitheatre should crouch familiarly at the feet of the martyrs, and inoffensive animals readily obey the commands of the friends of God? This universal empire over nature, therefore, by no means clashes with pre-conceived ideas or reason enlightened by faith, but none the less merits our entire admiration. Is it not, in effect, one of the most precious prerogatives of recovered innocence, as well as one of the most delightful spectacles given to man to contemplate in this lower region, that after the original fall a child of man should, in the fullest sense of the word, be "king of creation"? Ah! without a doubt nature was beautiful and harmonious when it came from the hands of God! Undoubtedly man was beautiful, man was great, when he gave a name to each of the animals, and extended his royal sceptre over the whole universe. But is it not a still more admirable and touching spectacle to see one of the sons of Adam, Francesco Moriconi, wash away the last remains of sin, efface every vestige of the original malediction in the blood of the Lamb, and even in this world participate in the eternal royalty of Christ risen and triumphant?

Such is the *ensemble* of the qualities, virtues, and privileges of S. Francis, an *ensemble* so ravishing and harmonious, so far above all earthly beauty, that this seraphic figure has not its equal in the history of ages, and the masters of the Umbrian school, Giotto and Perugino, have regarded it as the type of regenerated man. After six hundred years it has still the power to move, to ravish us, to awaken our enthusiasm; and when we strive to convey our sentiments of admiration, we are obliged to borrow our expressions from the Royal Prophet, and exclaim with him,

"*Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis!*" God is admirable in all His works, in the least as well as in the greatest, in the smallest drop of dew on the leaves of the forest, in which are reflected the glowing lights of heaven, as well as in the vast seas, where thousands of vessels ride majestically with sails unfurled. He is still more admirable in His saints, the master-pieces of His grace, and the ideal of human nature regenerated, restored, exalted by the light of the Gospel and the blood of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XVII.

MONTE ALVERNO—S. FRANCIS RECEIVES THE STIGMATA.

(*1224.*)

AT the entrance of Tuscany, a short distance from the borders of Umbria, rises a mountain whose sombre summit looms in the distance above the long chain of the Apennines, and whose base is bathed by five rivers, the Tiber and Arno on the western, and the Metauro, Foglia, and Marecchia on the eastern slope. It is Alverno, blessed mountain which, if it were permissible to associate it with memories of the Gospel, we would willingly call the Thabor and Calvary of S. Francis. It was there he enjoyed all the delights of heavenly contemplation, and poured out his blood in streams. His journeys and sojourn on Alverno have traced too luminous a track in history not to rivet our gaze and attract our whole attention.*

* The pages concerning Alverno and the stigmatisation of S. Francis are taken from the *Chronicle* of Bernard of Besse.

Francis's first journey to Alverno goes back to the spring of 1213. He was then on his way to Spain, and from thence to Morocco. Now, he happened to be passing by the castle of Montefeltro at a time when they were preparing for a tournament. The seigneurial banner was already floating over the portal; the court of honour clanged under the hoofs of the palfreys; and the far-resounding blare of trumpets from the lofty crenelated towers announced the opening of the fête. A young Count di Montefeltro, having made his vigil of arms, was advancing to be invested with knighthood in presence of the whole Florentine nobility. Francis, who delighted in these fêtes, at once religious and military, said to his travelling companion, "Brother Leo, let us go up to the castle; God aiding, we will make a spiritual knight there." When the ceremonies were over and the knights assembled in the court of honour, Francis unceremoniously mounted a hillock and eloquently descanted before his noble auditory on the Italian proverb, *Tanto è il bene ch' io aspetto, ch' ogni pena m' è diletto.* ("The good I hope for is so great, that all pain is a pleasure.") He instanced by turns the example of the apostles, martyrs, and confessors of the faith, who willingly faced all sorts of torments to conquer heaven. The nobles, penetrated with involuntary emotion, listened to every word with as much respect as if they fell from the lips of angel. One, Count Orlando di Chiusi di Casentino, one of those elect souls who are in the world but not of it, came away from the group after the exhortation, approached the saint, and, drawing him aside, said, "Father, I have long sighed for this hour; I wish very much to have a conversation with you about the salvation of my soul." Francis, as dis-

creet as he was zealous, replied with an amiable smile, "Willingly, but not now; first, do your friends the honour of assisting at the fête; and, after the repast, we will talk over it as long as you please." Count Orlando took the saint's advice. The banquet once over, he hurried back to Francis, and they discoursed for a long time on the happiness of heaven and the means of getting there. After this heavenly converse, all too brief for his taste, Count Orlando said to the saint, "I have on my property one of those desolate mountains that move the mind to meditation. Take a look at it, and if you like it, I will give it to you with all my heart, to you and your companions, for the salvation of my soul." Francis accepted the proposition and promised to immediately send two of his brethren to visit Monte Alverno, while he continued his journey to Spain.

The two religious selected by the holy Patriarch went up to the castle of Chiusi, an old manor whose imposing ruins are still to be seen on the banks of the little river Rasina, a mile from Alverno. Count Orlando received them with all the honours, and assembled an escort of fifty armed men to defend them against wild beasts and brigands, himself leading the little cavalcade. The mountain is difficult of access; on three sides it presents a succession of bare and almost perpendicular rocks, the fourth, the only one accessible, being covered with clusters of trees hiding frightful precipices. Perilous as was the ascent, our explorers boldly tried it; and they had no need to repent it. The variety of views disclosed to their gaze kept up their courage; they could never sufficiently feast their eyes on scenery so sternly grand, so awfully sublime, so full of surprises that it defies the artist's pencil. At

length they reached the summit, where they found a rich plateau crowned with beeches and luxuriant meadows. The place pleased the two Friars, who accepted Orlando's donation in the name of Francis, and hastily constructed a cabin and temporary chapel, where they sang the Divine office, taking possession of the mountain by prayer.

On his return from Spain, Francis investigated all that had occurred. The Friars depicted this solitude in such beautiful colours, that he said to those about him, "My dear children, S. Michael's lent is approaching; I think God calls us to pass it upon this mountain, to consecrate it to the Saviour, to His glorious Mother, and the holy angels, by penitence." And immediately he set out, accompanied by Friars Leo, Angelo, and Masseo. "My son," said he to the latter, "you will be our superior during the journey. We will keep our Rule on the way just as at the convent, reciting the Divine office, observing silence, and trusting to Providence for food and rest." The three religious bowed, and Masseo assumed the direction of the little troop. The first night was passed in a convent of the Order. The second night, bad weather and fatigue obliged our travellers to seek shelter in an old abandoned church, where they slept profoundly. Francis alone remained up praying; but he had to undergo a terrible attack from the demons. Those evil spirits, furious at seeing their empire destroyed, appeared to him under terrifying aspects, rushed at him, struck him repeated blows, and left him half dead on the pavement. In the thick of the fight, Francis, like the soldier who combats valiantly under the eyes of his captain, raised his heart to God. "O Lord Jesus," he cried, "I thank You for all Your benefits, and particularly for this, which is a

manifest pledge of Your love. You punish my sins in this world, to spare me in the next. My heart is ready, O my God, my heart is ready to suffer a thousand times more, if it is Your will." The Seraphic Doctor tells us that Francis often had to struggle in this way with the demons, but that those proud spirits, unable to vanquish his constancy, were always shamefully put to flight.*

The next morning Francis found himself reduced to such a state of weakness that he could not continue the journey on foot. His companions went to the nearest village and came across a brave ploughman, who willingly lent his ass to the blessed Father and joined their company. They resumed their journey, the holy Patriarch leading the way mounted on his peaceable nag, the peasants and Friars following at some distance. While ascending the first pass of the mountain, the peasant, with his Umbrian frankness, said to Francis, "Father, tell me the truth; are you really that Francis of Assisi whom they talk so much about?" "Yes," replied the saint. "Well," continued the man, "try to be as good as the people say you are, so that they may not be deceived." Charmed with such simplicity, the humble Francis alights from his nag, throws himself on his knees before the peasant, and kisses his feet, thanking him for his good advice, and then remounts.

According as they advanced through the winding gorges of Alverno, the ascent became steeper, the path more abrupt, the sun more intense. One should have travelled across mountains to realise the suffering under such circumstances. The peasant, exhausted with the thirst and heat, suddenly cried out, "I cannot go any

* S. Bonaventure, chap. x.

farther; I shall die if I cannot get anything to drink." But there was not a drop of water in that desert! Francis pitied the poor ploughman, and with arms uplifted towards heaven, implored the succour of Providence with that complete confidence which is the surest guarantee of success. Is it not written, that God is a father, the best and tenderest of fathers, who condescends to the least wishes of those who love Him? Presently, feeling that his prayer was heard, the saint turned to the peasant and said, pointing to a huge boulder, "Seest thou that rock? Go thither; thou wilt find a limpid spring which the Saviour, in His mercy and goodness towards thee, has caused to gush forth to slake thy thirst." The man believed in the saint's word; he looked upon him as another Moses all-powerful over the heart of God. He ran to the spot indicated, and there, sure enough, found a delicious fresh-water spring. When he had slaked his thirst, the miraculous fountain ceased to flow and disappeared for ever.* There is not perhaps in the whole life of our saint a more delightful page than this. What a picture! A few travellers lost in the midst of a mountain, a man suffering horribly from thirst, a saint praying and his prayer heard; and, in the background, the Most High watching with maternal tenderness over His servants' lives! Is not that scene, so simple and yet so grand, enough to inspire our Christian artists?

Our travellers at length reached the summit, and the pleasure of having arrived at their journey's end made them forget the fatigues of the ascent.† Francis sat down under an old oak-tree, and looking round at the virgin forests and the immense panorama disclosed

* S. Bonaventure, chap. viii.

† Alverno is 1462 metres above the level of the sea.

to his gaze—the bright sky overhead, the magnificent plains of Tuscany at his feet, and the peaks of Monte Cimone in the distance—he was enraptured with the beauty of the situation. The solitude of Alverno pleased, and the austere majesty of the mountains enchanted him. At the same moment a flock of birds swarmed about him, fluttered over his head, hands, and shoulders, welcoming him with their cries and flapping their wings. Although accustomed to their caresses, he marvelled much at this sight, and said to his companions, "I see we must remain here, since our arrival causes such joy to our brothers the birds."

Count Orlando, having learned that Francis was on the heights of Alverno, hurried thither in all haste, accompanied by some men and laden with provisions, to find the religious at prayer. The saint immediately rose to meet his noble visitor, and led him under a fine beech-tree about a stone's throw from the cells of the other Friars. "Thanks," said he, "for having given us this holy mountain. And now, if you wish to crown your gift, make me a little cabin of boughs with the branches of this tree for its roof." The count at once gave orders for the saint's wishes to be carried out. It is easy to understand how such an hermitage, or rather such an oratory, with the gnarled trunks of an old beech-tree for pillars, its interlaced branches for pointed arches, for decorations the leaves with their infinite variety of tints, touched with the golden light of the setting sun, for carpet the mossy green-sward dotted with large ferns and blue-bells, and with a glimpse of the azure heavens overhead, was pleasing to a contemplative mind like Francis of Assisi. In the evening when the hour of Count Orlando's departure came, the saint warmly thanked him for his visit and his attentions

and gave him and his men his blessing; after which the nobleman, taking the religious aside, said, "My dear Friars, I do not wish that the necessaries of life should ever hinder you devoting yourselves to the undisturbed meditation of heavenly things on this holy mountain; and I tell you, once for all, that I wish you should come to my house for all that you want. If you act otherwise, I shall be greatly annoyed." He then descended Alverno with his retainers to regain the castle of Chiusi.

After his departure, Angelo, Leo, and Masseo, reclining on the mossy sward, gathered round their blessed Father to receive his instructions. It was a solemn hour. The sun had long gone down behind the lowest peaks of the Apennines; the stars, sparkling in the firmament, shed an uncertain light upon the earth; a light, refreshing breeze had arisen; and the sounds of life were hushed at the base of the mountain. The soul felt nearer God. The Friars were silent, as if they feared to awaken the mountain echoes or disturb their Father's meditations. "Brothers," said he at length, "do not rely too much upon Signor Orlando's generous proposition, for fear of violating our vow of poverty. Be assured, that if we are really poor the world will compassionate us. If we truly embrace holy poverty, they will supply us with our daily bread in abundance; while if we depart from it, they will depart from us. Is it not God who has called us to this Institute for the conversion of peoples? Hence, is there not a kind of tacit compact between them and us, equally obligatory on both the contracting parties,—we to edify the people by our good example, and the people, who are God's proxies, to provide for all our temporal wants? Let us be faithful, therefore, in

doing our duty, that is, in observing evangelical poverty, because it is perfection and the pledge of eternal riches."

The Friars' cells, being only made of leaves, were an insufficient protection against the inclemency of the seasons; besides, they had no suitable habitation wherein to enshrine the Eucharistic God. The holy Patriarch, therefore, thought of building a chapel and a little convent; and, as soon as Orlando came back, unfolded his design to him. The count approved of it, and a few days after brought with him some pious workmen from the environs to carry out the plan traced by the saint, and which he assured them he had received from the very hands of the Blessed Virgin.

While they were working at this building, Francis explored the mountain in search of places the most favourable to contemplation. Presently he found himself in view of enormous masses of rock disclosing large rents, deep caves, and overhanging boulders. The saint, suspecting some mystery, had recourse to prayer, and begged the Divine Master to enlighten him as to the origin of these natural phenomena; whereupon an angel appeared to him and said, "These phenomena were produced at the moment of the death of the Lord Jesus, when the earth trembled and the rocks were rent." This circumstance rendered Monte Alverno still dearer to the passionate lover of Jesus Crucified.

A strange event disturbed the Friars' retreat. Opposite the plateau they occupied rises a bare rock of sinister aspect, separated from the others, which it overlooks, by ravines and precipices, and only reachable by a drawbridge. A bandit, popularly called the

Wolf, on account of his cruelty, had spied out a cavern there, and, driving the wild beasts out of it, had made it his den, one might almost say his citadel. He only quitted it, as is customary with footpads, to rifle and levy blackmail on travellers, like the eagle who only quits its eyrie to pounce upon its prey. He did not like our pious anchorites as neighbours. Crime is apt to take umbrage, and the sight of good men is offensive to it. The bandit, therefore, came one day to find the Friars Minors, and summoned them, in an insolent tone, to leave Alverno and not to come there to disturb his rest. Francis received him so meekly, listened to him so patiently, and spoke to him so kindly, that his fury was immediately appeased. Prostrating himself at our saint's feet, he begged him to obtain from God the pardon of his crimes, and solicited the favour of remaining some time in his company, a favour which was accorded him. Seeing the Friars' angelic life, he was so promptly transformed into another man that he asked to share their lot. The holy Patriarch, admiring in this sudden conversion a miracle of grace, lovingly received "the wolf," clothed him with the penitential habit without further delay, and gave him, as a symbol of his change of life, the gentle name of Fra Agnello. Fra Agnello passed the rest of his days on Monte Alverno, where he died holily, after changing the scene of his brigandage into a place of prayer and mortification. The rock upon which he dwelt still bears the name of the "Rock of Friar Wolf."

Such are the various incidents of Francis's first journey to Alverno. The second journey, which he made in 1220 with Cardinal Ugolino, has left no trace in history. The third is the apogee of his sufferings and his glory. It will not be surprising, therefore,

that we should record with filial fondness its principal events and its denouement.

It was in the month of August 1224. Francis, a little over forty-two, attenuated by vigils and fatigue, but longing more and more for silence, light and love, was urged by the Spirit of God to regain the solitary heights of Alverno. Despite the excessive heat, he immediately set out from Our Lady of Angels, taking with him his two customary companions, Leo and Masseo. During his sojourn on the mountain he was more than ever overwhelmed with heavenly favours. Brother Leo attests having several times seen him suspended between heaven and earth, at one time only the height of a man, at another time lost to view. In the first instance he kissed his feet and watered them with his tears, crying, "My God, by the merits of my blessed Father, be propitious to a poor sinner like me, and deign to communicate to me a small share of Your grace." On the second occasion he prostrated himself with his face to the earth, and prayed upon the very spot whence S. Francis had arisen into the air. During those long ecstasies the Seraphic Patriarch, wholly absorbed in the contemplation of the mysteries of the Passion, lovingly bewailed to his Jesus never having shed his blood for the faith, and implored at least the grace of being completely transformed into Him. In return the Lord revealed to him that his wish was granted.

On the evening of the feast of the Assumption, which began our saint's lent of S. Michael, he retired into the wildest grotto he could find on the southern slope of the mountain,* the more composedly to surrender himself to the action of grace. "Dear sheep of the good

* A little to the south-east, about 1208 metres above the level of the sea.

God," said he to his companion, "leave me to myself, and let no one come hither to disturb me; only thou wilt be so charitable as to bring me a little bread and water every evening. Thou wilt return at midnight at the hour of matins; thou wilt knock at the door, saying, '*Domine, labia aperies.*' If I reply, enter our cell; if not, return."

Brother Leo, as he went away, was assailed by a temptation which tortured his mind for several days, and which he was afraid to tell his blessed Father; only he wished to have some pious sentence written under his hand, persuaded that he would be delivered by this means from the temptation. The saint, knowing by revelation the Friar's trial and his wish, wrote the following blessing, which he initialed with the letter Thau:—"*Benedicat tibi, Dominus, et custodiat te; ostendat faciem suam tibi, et misereatur tui; convertat vultum suum ad te, et det tibi pacem. T. Dominus benedicat te, Frater Leo.*" "Take this writing," said he, "and preserve it all thy life." Brother Leo had no sooner received it than the temptation vanished.*

Among the numerous apparitions with which our Lord favoured His servant on the mountain, there are two which the Friars Minors can never forget. In the first He appeared seated on the stone table where the saint was taking his meal, and conversed familiarly with him, like one friend with another; after which Francis, interpenetrated with the sense of the Divine Majesty, called Friar Leo and said, "We must cleanse this stone with water, wine, milk, oil, and balm, for the Son of God has sanctified it by His presence, and deigned to assure me that He would for ever bless our

* S. Bonaventure says that several sick persons were miraculously cured by the simple contact of this parchment.

Order." And immediately, after the example of Jacob, he consecrated this stone to the Lord, pouring oil thereon, and uttering these words, "Truly this is the altar of God!"*

The second apparition followed close upon the first, and was still more explicit. Friar Leo, having come about midnight to knock at Francis's door, and getting no reply, had the curiosity to look through the chinks to see what was going on. The grotto was inundated with supernatural light. Francis was kneeling, his arms as usual crossed upon his breast; his box-wood beads hung by his side, while his right hand was pressed to his heart, letting the modest crucifix he had so often bedewed with his tears rest upon his left arm. A bright beam of light coming down from heaven illumined his brow, and his eyes were fixed on an invisible object which seemed to attract his gaze and absorb his whole soul. The Master and servant were exchanging some words; but Friar Leo could not gather the meaning of this divine dialogue; he only remarked that the saint repeated from time to time his usual prayer, "Who are you, Lord, and who am I?" Then he saw him rise, put his hand in his bosom three times, and each time extend it towards the mysterious flame; after which the voices became mute, the light disappeared, and all was darkness and silence.

Friar Leo felt like a man who had fallen. He looked around him. It was the same landscape; the beech-trees cast the same awesome shadows; the greyish rocks reflected the silvery light of the stars; but everything appeared to him duller and more sombre than before. He glanced back at the cavern; it had

* This stone, protected by an iron grating, is exposed to popular veneration in the sanctuary of Monte Alverno.

resumed its austere aspect, and no trace remained of the divine visit: it was no longer the gate of heaven.

Conscious of his indiscretion, he wished to retire noiselessly; but Francis, who had overheard him, called him back and gently reproached him, "Dear sheep of the good God, why hast thou sought to know what was to remain hidden?" The Friar confessed his fault; and, having obtained forgiveness, added, "Please, Father, for the greater glory of God, explain to me the meaning of the vision you have had." The saint consented through a spirit of obedience and humility: the angelic Leo was his confessor and confidant. "Brother," said he, "the Lord appeared to me in that flame thou hast seen. He communicated to me such a lofty knowledge of His perfections and my own nothingness, that I could not refrain from crying out, 'My God, who are you, and whom am I? Why do you deign to bend your eyes upon me who am only a worm of the earth?' The Lord Jesus revealed to me mysteries so sublime that the human mind could not comprehend them. Before ascending to heaven He thus bade me adieu: 'Francis, in exchange for all the good gifts thou hast received from me, offer me some present.' 'Ah! Lord, you know I have nothing more in the world, and that I have long been yours unreservedly.' 'Put thy hand in thy bosom, and give me what thou wilt find there.' I obeyed; thrice I put my hand in my bosom, and each time drew out a beautiful golden piece which I hastened to offer Him. Bewildered, I asked Him what those three miraculous gold pieces signified. 'They represent,' He replied, 'the three vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity, faithfully kept by the religious; they also represent the three Orders of which

I have made thee the founder and father. Now, in exchange for what thou hast given me, I here renew the three promises I have already made to thee: firstly, I will devote a special love and special assistance to all who shall become thy children; secondly, I will bless their friends and curse their persecutors; thirdly, thy triple family will last to the end of time.' "

Having spoken these words, Francis dismissed his companion, forbidding him ever to divulge the secret of those apparitions, or henceforward try to see what passed between God and him.*

We beg our readers will not close this book on the pretext that we are piloting them with full sails over the ocean of the supernatural. We conjure them not to forget that we are relating the life of a saint, and an extraordinary saint, who is the living image, the perfect copy of the Saviour of mankind. They will understand that the Most High acts with weight and measure, without precipitation; that, finding a pure and docile soul like Francis, He causes it to ascend from light to light, from virtue to virtue, and thus leads it, by mysterious ascensions, to those sublime heights where we shall presently see it.

The more the holy Patriarch meditated on the wounds and sorrows of the God-Man, the more his heart became a burning furnace of love; the more, too, he felt inflamed with the desire of resembling his divine model. Having learned from the lips of an angel that he would find in the oracles of the holy Gospel what God expected from him, he sent for Brother Leo. Thrice Leo opened the book of the Gospels, and thrice he came upon the Passion of Jesus Christ; from which Francis concluded that, after imi-

* Bernard of Besse; *Fioretti.*

tating the Saviour in His hidden life and His apostolate, he was also to resemble Him in His unspeakable martyrdom.

Courage, Francis! Halt not on the way to Calvary. It is not enough to have wept with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemani; it is not enough with S. Veronica to have wiped off the dust, perspiration, and blood that sullied His adorable face, nor even, with Simon the Cyrenean, to have helped him to toil up the rugged paths of Golgotha. Thy thirst of sacrifice is not slaked. Ascend higher, ascend the Cross to be crucified with Jesus. Prepare thy heart; thy hour of mystical immolation has struck!

We are here in presence of one of those mysterious scenes to describe which the tongue of a poor sinner falters, for fear of profaning it. Let us be silent, then, and leave it to a seraphic pen to record such heavenly marvels.*

"At daybreak on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14), the angelic Francis was at prayer on the slope of the mountain.† Suddenly he saw a seraph with six flaming wings of dazzling brightness descending from the high heavens. The angel flew with a rapid flight quite close to him, and remained poised in air; and then appeared between its wings the image of the crucified Jesus. At this sight the soul of Francis was filled with amazement. Joy and sorrow possessed him by turns; joy because he had before him the God of his heart, the God of love in the form of a seraph; sorrow, because it was Jesus suffering, with His hands and feet nailed to the Cross, and His heart pierced with a lance. He had before

* S. Bonaventure.

† To the south-east, as we have said before.

his eyes an unfathomable mystery, and his astonishment was extreme; for how reconcile the humiliations of Calvary with the glories of the beatific vision? At length he understood by an infused light the hidden sense of this vision, and that it was not bodily martyrdom, but rather the fire of love that was to completely transform him into his Beloved.

"The vision disappeared, but it left in his heart a marvellous fervour, and in his flesh the not less marvellous mark of the divine impress. In effect, there suddenly appeared in his members the five wounds he had been adoring in the Apparition. His hands and feet seemed transpierced by large nails, whose round black heads were distinctly visible, and whose long crooked points passed through the back of the hands and the soles of the feet. The large, gaping wound in the side disclosed a reddish scar, whence the blood often flowed over the saint's garments.

"The servant of God then bore the sacred stigmata visibly imprinted in his flesh. This heavenly favour threw him into great perplexity: should he reveal it or keep silent? He did not know what decision to come to; for, on the one hand, he could not long conceal it from the gaze of his intimate companions; and, on the other, he dreaded publishing the Lord's secret. He sent for some of his disciples, and laid his difficulty before them in vague, general terms, as if it concerned some one else. But one of them, Fra Illuminato (the same who accompanied him to the East), judging from his emotion that he must have received some extraordinary grace, 'Father,' said he, 'know that it is not for yourself alone, but also for your neighbour, that the mysteries of heaven are unveiled to you. If you keep them exclusively to yourself, it seems to me you have

every reason to fear that God will one day demand of you an account of the buried talent.'

"This advice made an impression on the Seraphic Father; and although he usually said, '*Secretum meum mihi*,' this time he told everything, not without misgiving, of the vision he had had, adding, however, that the seraph had revealed to him things which during his life he would discover to no one. Perhaps the Angel's conversation was so divine that human language would be powerless to translate it. S. Francis having concluded his lent in honour of S. Michael, descended from the mountain, wholly transfigured by divine love and bearing the image of the Crucified, engraven not on stone or wood but in his own flesh by the hand of the living God. He strove to conceal 'the secret of the great King;' but God, to whom it belongs to make His works shine before men, operated numerous prodigies to attest the authenticity of the sacred stigmata.

"In vain Francis kept his hands always covered, and wore sandals; he could not succeed in completely concealing the treasures of heaven. A great number of Friars, several Cardinals, and Pope Alexander IV. himself, have affirmed on oath having seen with their own eyes the venerable stigmata of the saint while he was still living. At his death more than fifty Friars, the illustrious virgin Clare with her sisters, and innumerable seculars, have piously pressed their lips thereto and touched them with their hands, so that nothing was wanting to strengthen this evidence.

"As to the wound in the side, Francis concealed it so well that one could only catch a glimpse of it by stealth during his life. A Friar who was very attentive to him (Friar Leo) one day begged him to take off his habit, on the pretext of dusting it. Thanks to this

pious ingenuity, he saw and examined the wound, and by gently applying three of his fingers to it measured its extent. The Vicar-General (Friar Elias) in the same way succeeded in getting a look at it. Another of the saint's companions (Friar Ruffino), a man of perfect simplicity, applying some ointment to his shoulders to give him relief in his infirmities, inadvertently touched the wound near the heart. Francis felt such acute pain that from that day forward he wore a broad tunic covering his sides. The Friar who washed his tunic finding it stained with blood could no longer doubt the existence of this wound; and after the Seraphic Father's death they were enabled to satisfy their devotion, and gaze at leisure on the wound in the side and the other stigmata of the servant of God. Now that thou art arrayed with the sacred stigmata, O Francis, thou art that Angel of the Apocalypse whom S. John saw rising in the East, and who bore upon his brow the sign of the living God."

The son of Bernardone bore the five wounds of Our Lord, adorning his flesh like so many precious rubies and pearls. Such is the miracle witnessed by the people for more than two years—a miracle unheard of in the preceding centuries,* and the most incompre-

* In the centuries succeeding S. Francis down to our days the number of saints or favoured souls who have, either internally or externally, visibly or invisibly, received the stigmata form a continuous unbroken chain. Dr. Imbert-Gourbeyre, who made a careful study of the subject, the full detailed history of which still remains to be written, gives a list of a hundred and forty-five, which he thinks falls short of the actual number. There were to his knowledge eight *stigmatisées* living at the date of the publication of his work (1873), and he was persuaded for several reasons that the number is still more considerable. The best known are Louise Lateau of Bois d'Haine in Belgium, and Palma Matarelli of Oria, near Naples. The miracle is of much more frequent occur-

hensible of the prodigies of divine love in souls. It is the most glorious privilege of the Seraphic Patriarch, and at the same time one of the best attested facts; it can only be doubted by denying all historical certitude. How is it to be supposed that personages so grave as S. Bonaventure and Bernard of Besse, and eye-witnesses so well informed as Thomas of Celano, Leo, Ruffino, and Masseo would let themselves be deceived? What interest had they in deceiving each other or in deceiving us? And then would not the people of Umbria have protested, they who could so easily have convinced themselves of the reality of the fact? They believed and wondered because, so to speak, they felt (*palpaient*) the truth of the prodigy. God Himself seemed to take pleasure in confirming them in those sentiments, and putting His miraculous seal on the divine origin of the saint's stigmatisation. There is nothing more engaging than the narrative of all those miracles; but, wishing to be brief, we will only cite two, one taken from the *Legend* of S. Bonaventure, and the other from the *Chronicle* of Bernard of Besse.

rence in modern times than in the preceding centuries. The general list includes twenty men and a hundred and twenty-five women. Of these, ninety-four bore the stigmata externally, thirty-four simply participated in the sufferings of the Passion, and the rest were internally or invisibly stigmatised. In twenty-five cases the stigmatisation was complete. The *stigmatisées* chiefly belonged to the religious Orders. The Dominicans can count sixty; the Franciscan of every branch, forty-three; the Augustinians, seven; Carmelites, seven; Cistercians, five; and so on, in smaller proportions, the other Orders. Italy alone produced sixty-four; Spain, nineteen; France, sixteen; Germany, ten; Portugal, eight; Belgium, seven; Sicily and Switzerland, four. There were twelve *stigmatisées* who lived in the marriage state. About thirty-five have been raised to the honours of the altars, and the processes for the beatification of a large number are being proceeded with in Rome. Three have been canonised in this century.—*Trans.*

"Nature itself," says the Seraphic Doctor, "changed its laws, the better to preserve the memory of so great an event. Alverno, before that, was a stormy peak, whence came down whirlwinds and clouds laden with hail. This scourge completely ceased from the day when the Seraphic Father received the sacred stigmata."

Now let us listen to Bernard of Besse. "An extraordinary occurrence took place in a Dominican convent beyond the mountains.* According to the usage of the two Orders, a fine picture of S. Francis was hung up on the walls of the refectory, opposite the portrait of S. Dominic. Our blessed Father was represented with the stigmata. All the religious of the monastery venerated his image, except one who, unable to admit such a prodigy, or bear that any one should speak of it, resolved to efface the stigmata. Twice he set to work, alone and unseen in the darkness of the night; twice he found the wound more brilliant than before. The third time, in his rage, he tore the canvas; but all at once the blood spurted out in streams, and covered his face, hands, and garments. Terrified, he falls down almost unconscious. Fortunately his brethren arrive and pick him up; but in vain they try to stop the blood. Then, suspecting their companion's fault, they make *amende honorable*, and ask S. Francis's pardon. Their prayer is heard; the blood immediately stops, the rents disappear, and the reclosed wounds assume their usual colour. The incredulous Friar was converted. Henceforward he became one of the most ardent defenders of the privilege he had denied, visited the basilicas of Assisi and Portiuncula, and even ascended to the summit of Alverno, whither he carried

* The author does not indicate whether he means by that France or Germany.

some pieces of linen used to stop the miraculous blood. It is from his own mouth we have received all these details."

It was thus the Most High Himself took in hand His faithful servant's cause. Besides, for the stigmatisation of Francis as for the Portiuncula indulgence, one word decides the question: Rome, so particular in these matters, has spoken. Let us hear Gregory IX., whose evidence has a double value, as that of the Sovereign Pontiff and the saint's intimate friend.

"Gregory, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to all the faithful of Jesus Christ who shall see these letters, health and apostolic benediction.

"We deem it unnecessary to enlarge in these letters on the great merits that have led to the heavenly country the glorious confessor S. Francis, since there are hardly any of the faithful who have not heard of them; but We have considered that it behoved us to instruct you all more particularly on the marvellous and singular favour with which he has been honoured by Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the glory and splendour of the saints. By an effect of the creative power of God, he has received during his life the stigmata in the hands, feet, and side, of which one could verify the existence after his death. The certain knowledge We and Our brethren the Cardinals have had of it, as well as of his other miracles, authentically certified by very credible witnesses, was the principal motive that induced Us to inscribe him in the Catalogue of the saints, by the advice of Our brethren the Cardinals and all the prelates then assembled around Us. As therefore it is Our earnest desire that it be believed by all the faithful, We pray and conjure your piety in Our Lord Jesus Christ, enjoining it for the remission of your sins, to

shut your ears to anything that may be said to the contrary, and to have for this holy confessor a veneration and devotion which may render him propitious on your behalf with God, so that, thanks to his merits and intercession, the Lord may grant you to prosper in this world, and be eternally happy in the other. Given at Viterbo, the second day of April, in the eleventh year of Our Pontificate." *

In the year 1255, Pope Alexander IV. addressed an apostolic letter not less valuable than the preceding to the Friars Minors. In this Bull he declares that he takes under his special protection Monte Alverno, where the Seraphic Patriarch received the sacred stigmata, and earnestly recommends the Friars never to abandon those places, and to maintain for ever the monastery founded by their blessed Father.

On the 20th of August 1260, Alverno was thrilled with the joyful spectacle of an imposing ceremony. S. Bonaventure, then General of the Order, encamped there at the head of an army of more than a thousand Friars Minors, while a crowd of pilgrims thronged the summit of the mountain. On that day the Bishops of Arezzo, Florence, Fiesole, Perugia, Assisi, Urbino, and

* The same Pontiff, in a letter, sternly rebuking the Bishop of Olmuth, in Bohemia, for his "excessive presumption" in forbidding the Franciscans in his diocese to speak of the stigmata, or depict the saint with those sacred emblems, says that the proofs of his miraculous reception of them is as conclusive and striking as that S. Peter was crucified, that their truth had been amply attested by innumerable witnesses of the most unquestionable veracity, and published to the entire world by the authority of the Catholic Church, grounded in all her decisions by the special assistance of the Holy Ghost. His Holiness also rebuked the Dominican Echard, who, while preaching at Opparo, in Moravia, treated the whole matter as a fabulous invention of the Franciscans; suspending him from his office of preacher, and citing him to appear at Rome.—*Trans.*

Città-di-Castello consecrated the principal church of the convent under the title of S. Mary of the Angels and S. Francis; then, making the circuit of the mountain processionally, they blessed it under the name of "The Seraphic Mountain." Benedict XI. ordered the feast of the Stigmata of S. Francis to be celebrated on the 17th of September every year in all the houses of the Order, and Paul V. extended it to the whole Catholic world. The Sovereign Pontiffs have thus confirmed the authenticity of the miracle by their apostolic authority. So the Seraphic Mountain has for more than six hundred years been the resort of pilgrims, and the current of faith that drew the people of the Middle Ages to this Franciscan Calvary has never ebbed, except during the days of trial through which we are passing.

Perhaps our readers, unable to undertake this distant pilgrimage, will be happy to have the description of the monument which the faith of centuries has raised on these heights? We are going to satisfy their legitimate desire. "The convent is irregular like the ground; the door, low and massive, fixed in the rock, calls to mind the doors of feudal manors. You are in a little square courtyard, opposite a portico supported by two columns; it is the entrance to the lower church, the oldest monument on Alverno. On the semicircular door is an antique bas-relief representing the stigmatisation of S. Francis. On each side are the arms of Count Orlando, a cross and three fleurs de lis, glorious *souvenirs* for a Frenchman." * The monastery contains several guest-houses. There, no one ever knocks at the door without being received; there, the religious hasten to share with you the alms they receive. From

* Em. Chavin de Malan.

the lower you enter the higher or principal church, begun in 1348 by the Count da Chiusi, and only finished a century later by the Senate of Florence, to whom Pope Eugenius IV. had confided the custody of Monte Alverno. It is spacious, lightsome, and surrounded by a portico, from whence the eye surveys an immense stretch of country. This portico is continued as far as the Church of the Stigmata, in the centre of which is seen, through a railing, the ever-blessed spot where the fiery-winged seraph appeared to Francis. Every evening after Complin, and every night after Matins, the religious repair processionally from the principal church to that of the Stigmata.

Who would not admire in all this one of the most touching marvels of Providence? Six hundred years ago and the name of Alverno was scarcely known; but since the Penitent of Assisi set foot there, the name of the Seraphic Mountain is in all mouths, and, if we except the holy mountains of Judea, its glory is unrivalled. Here, as on Calvary, the praises of God are unceasingly on human lips. It is time to quit this hallowed ground, from whence one never descends without feeling better and purer. Let us then in thought kiss that earth where Francis suffered, where Bonaventure prayed, where the Saviour Himself appeared; and, as a last farewell, let us cry out with the Royal Prophet: "Hail, O mountain, fertile in graces and miracles! A mountain in which God is well pleased to dwell: for there the Lord shall dwell unto the end." *

* Ps. lxvii. 17.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Last Years of S. Francis—His Testament—His Death.

(*1224-1226.*)

Poetry alone can give expression to the grand emotions of the soul. Thus have we seen Francis, in presence of the beauties of nature, improvise his fine "Canticle of the Sun." But if perishable, fragile creatures wrang such cries of admiration from him, what will it be when he has contemplated with the eyes of the flesh Him who is the eternal and substantial Beauty? How can he restrain the loving sentiments with which his heart is overflowing? In two lyrical chaunts, one would say written under the glowing inspiration of divine raptures, he pours out his soul.

They are both attributed to S. Francis by S. Bernardine of Siena, who has bequeathed them to us; and we know no sufficient reason for contradicting the opinion of so faithful an interpreter of the Franciscan traditions. Other historians include them in the works of the Blessed Jacopone di Todi, another disciple of Francis and the famous author of the *Stabat*. For our part we share the opinion of the learned Ozanam. The first, with the refrain, "*In foco l'Amor mi mise*," is the finest, and does not appear to have been retouched by another hand. At the most, Jacopone gave it a more classical rhythm, as Friar Pacificus did for the Canticle of the Sun; but we have no difficulty

in recognising the saint's chivalrous ideas and rich imaginative colouring. He represents his ecstasy on Alverno under the figure of an assault at arms, in which he himself rides into the arena of Christ and is happily conquered.

The second poem is much longer. We fail to find the concise and original turn of expression which is the distinctive characteristic of the works of S. Francis. It may, therefore, be admitted that the Blessed Jacopone freely paraphrased a grand and beautiful thought borrowed from some old canticle of the Seraphic Patriarch, as the pupils of a musician reproduce in a series of variations the subject given by the master. However that may be, this poem sparkles with beauties; let us listen to a few of the notes of this Italian poetry.

"I have quitted everything to acquire love; and, after sacrificing the world without reserve, have given myself. No, I can no longer gaze upon any creature; my soul has no voice but for its Creator. In presence of Christ my love, aught else seems to me an impure slime: heaven and earth have lost their attractions, the sun its splendour, the cherubim his light, the seraph his ardour.

"Heaven and earth, all creatures unceasingly tell me I must love. Each of them cries out, 'Love with all thy heart, love Him who created us to draw thee to Him.'

"Christ, so beautiful, draws my whole being, and, gazing on Him, I cry out with love, 'Love after whom I sigh, ah! make me die of love!' I am the prisoner of love; I cannot help it. The sentence is pronounced; I must die of love. Away with all relief! I wish to die of love."

One would think he heard an echo of the voice of

S. Augustin, or rather a prelude to S. Theresa's canticle of love.

When Francis had ended his forty days' fast and celebrated the feast of the Archangel S. Michael,* he quitted the heights of Alverno to return to Umbria, mounted on an ass, an humble animal he preferred to any other in remembrance of the Saviour's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and which he was obliged to use during the two last years of his life. He was quite astonished to find at the foot of the mountain a crowd of people from Borgo San Sepolcro and the environs awaiting him. Having remarked that the mountain was enveloped in unusual light on the 14th of September, and suspecting some supernatural prodigy, they crowded thither to venerate the saint. When Francis came down from this new Calvary they thought they saw a living crucifix, and thronging round him with that enthusiasm for which the people of Italy are remarkable, they venerated his sacred wounds and kissed his hands, completely swathed in linen.

In a small village near Arezzo the simple touch of his hand instantaneously cured a child of eight who had been dropsical for four years. At Montaigu he left his poor habit, doubtless the first dyed with the blood of the stigmata, to the pious Count Alberti. This precious relic later passed into the possession of the Grand Dukes of Tuscany. At Monte Casale they brought him word that one of his religious was tormented with a violent malady, which some took for epilepsy and others for diabolical obsession. The Seraphic Father took pity on him, gave him a bit of bread he was eating, and the sick man was instantaneously and

* S. Bonaventure, c. xiv.

radically cured. At Castello, he cured, by the sign of the Cross, a child eaten up with an ulcer, replaced by a red rose as an irrefutable testimony of this miraculous cure. Friar Leo, his travelling companion, assures us that during the whole way from Alverno to the convent of Portiuncula a luminous cross, more brilliant than gold, was seen over the saint's head. In the midst of all these prodigies, Francis, living more in heaven than on earth, remained insensible to the homage that was paid him.

At length, after a month's sojourn at Città-di-Castello, he returned to his dear convent of Our Lady of Angels. "Crucified with Jesus Christ in his spirit and in his flesh, he not only burned with the love of a seraph for God, but, like the Victim of Calvary, had a great thirst for the salvation of souls. No longer able to walk on account of the nails that pierced his feet, he was led, languishing and half dead, through the cities and towns to move the people to bear their cross worthily. He often said to his disciples, 'Brothers, let us at last begin to serve the good God; for up to this we have, so to speak, done nothing for Him.' Utterly worn out by the fatigues of the apostolate as he was, he ardently longed to return to the humble practices of the early time of his conversion, serving the lepers and all sorts of mortifications. If his limbs were weakened by suffering, his spirit always preserved its wonted vigour. He dreamed of new combats against the enemy of salvation; he hoped for new triumphs, and purposed extending the kingdom of Jesus Christ throughout the whole world; for when love spurs us on it allows neither respite nor repose, and always urges us forward." *

* S. Bonaventure.

To this beautiful page which we have take
the seraphic Doctor, let us add the shorter l
less admirable eulogy penned by Thomas of C
"Francis's zeal knew no bounds, it embrace
whole universe; the saint would have wished to d
the light of the Gospel everywhere. Indefati
worker, he was sometimes, despite his extreme w
ness, known to traverse five or six of the small to
of Umbria in a single day; so subject was his body
reason, and his reason to God!—virtue had become
much a second nature to him! And when he ma
his appearance, his voice, his habit, his stigma
everything about him was a preaching!" Thus di
he pass through the midst of the people like a liv
ing image of sanctity, doing God's work, more than
ever diffusing around him, and always unsuspectingly,
a life-giving odour, a heavenly glow that warmed the
heart, a perfume like the vapours of incense on a
summer's day. "To increase his merits, God, who
purifies gold in the furnace, caused him to pass anew
through the crucible of tribulations and maladies.
Soon his poor body was nothing but one wound,
nothing but a skeleton."* Alas! everything in this
world must come to an end. His eyes were the first
to refuse their service; they were almost blind from
weeping. In the midst of the most acute pain Francis
would accept no remedy, longing, like the Apostle, to
see that wall of mud that separated him from Jesus
Christ crumble. To break his resolution it needed
the authority of the Cardinal-Protector and Friar Elias,
who loved him like a mother. They transported him
to a cabin of reeds, near S. Damiens, in order that he
might the more easily receive the remedies prepared

* Thomas of Celano.

by S. Clare. There he remained forty days with four of his companions, Masseo, Ruffino, Leo his confessor, and Angelo Tancredi. What a gathering of saints in that humble nook!

There, one day that he was breaking down under the pressure of pain, they heard him utter this fervent prayer to Heaven: "O my God, cast Your eyes upon Your poor little servant; deign to come to my succour, and grant me the grace to bear patiently all these infirmities." A heavenly voice promptly replied, "Francis, can one pay too dear for a jewel which enables him to gain a priceless kingdom? Now, this jewel is suffering sent from God; know that it is worth more than all the treasures of earth, and that one should not deprive himself of it for the whole world, even if all the mountains were changed into pure gold, all the stones into diamonds, and all the water into balm." "Yes, Lord," replied the saint, "it is thus I appreciate the pains with which You visit me; they are a gift of Your love, which chastises me in this world in order to be eternally merciful to me in the other." "Rejoice, then," added the voice, "for that is the way that leads to heaven." At these words, the sick man rose full of renewed fervour and sent for the virgin Clare, almost always ill, in order that she too might derive profit from teaching so well calculated to console her; and those two angels of earth had a long colloquy on the value of suffering accepted in a Christian spirit, and of the infinite goodness of God whose hand is continually raised in blessing over His servants.

With what solicitude, with what a spirit of faith, the virgin Clare watched over a life so dear, over a health so useful to the Church, may be easily divined. She made a kind of sandal for him which, while

covering the wounds in his feet, facilitated walking; but every remedy, every precaution, failed to arrest the progress of the malady. Elias, for change of air, had him conveyed to the convent of Foligno, where he experienced some relief. From Foligno they soon after brought him to S. Mary of Angels, where, sick and languishing, he passed the greater part of the year 1225. At the time of the wine harvest, in early autumn, they led him to San Fabiano, near Rieti, in the hope that the atmosphere of the vineyards would be favourable to him.

The Pope with his whole court was then at Rieti. Several eminent personages and even princes of the Church came to San Fabiano to visit the man of God. While they were conversing with him, their not very scrupulous suite made their way into the parish priest's vineyard and ate all the grapes. The aggrieved priest complained to Francis, who asked him how much he had lost. "I harvest about fourteen hogsheads of wine every year," said the priest, "and that is enough for my house." "Well! take courage," said the saint, "God will repair the damage my presence has caused, and your vines will yield you the usual fourteen measures and even more!" The prediction was fulfilled; and out of the few grapes that escaped the devastation, the parish priest got twenty measures of wine. In commemoration of this miraculous multiplication the municipal council subsequently erected, on the site of the vineyard, a convent of Friars Minors, the modest church of which Gregory IX. (Cardinal Ugolino) was pleased to consecrate himself.*

After a few days' rest Francis repaired to Rieti to present his respects to the successor of Peter, Honorius

* Mariana.

III., who received him with all honour. He did not stop at the Pontifical palace, but at the house of a pious Saracen convert named Teobàldo, where, according to Mariana, he heard that angelic melody of which S. Bonaventure speaks. One night, wasted by fever and unable to close his eyes, he expressed a wish to hear a little music to comfort his soul. As there was no musician in the house, and the Friars pleaded ignorance, God Himself did not disdain to succour His faithful servant: an angel appeared with his golden viol in his hand and, letting his fingers glide over the instrument, drew from it such sweet, harmonious sounds that the saint's soul was as it were inebriated and his senses suspended. He could not conceal this prodigy from his companions. To this narrative of the seraphic Doctor the *Fioretti* add an incomparable detail, putting these words into the mouth of Francis: "If the angel had swept the chords a second time, my soul, drawn by that divine melody, would have escaped from my body."

These sensible consolations, however, were only momentary, while his sufferings became daily more acute. They transported the invalid to the convent of Monte Colombo, not far from Rieti, where his physicians, who followed him thither, prescribed the application of a red-hot iron to the temples to assuage the pains in his eyes. The remedy was atrocious, the operation exceedingly painful; Francis, nevertheless, consented, happy to suffer for the love of Jesus Crucified, and hoping, moreover, to recover his sight sufficiently to be able to resume his evangelical labours. When he saw the red-hot iron he could not repress a motion of fear; but, to conquer this natural repugnance, began to speak to the fire as we speak to a friend. "My brother fire, thou

whom the Lord has made so brilliant, useful, and beautiful, be salutary to me at this moment. I pray the great God who made thee to temper thy heat so that I may be able to bear thee." Then, having made the sign of the Cross over the glowing iron, he presented his head to the surgeon, who passed the instrument through the crackling flesh from the ear to the eyebrow without the patient betraying the least pain. After the operation he said to the Friars, "Let us praise the Lord; for I assure you I never felt the heat of the fire nor the least pain." And, turning to the physician, he begged him to recommence if he thought the operation was incomplete. The latter, admiring such strength of mind, could not refrain from exclaiming, "Truly, this is a day of miracles!" A scientific man and what is more a man of faith, he became very fond of his patient; attended him with a zeal beyond all praise, refusing any fee, and sparing neither his time nor money to try and cure him. As the gift of tears which Francis had received to a truly extraordinary extent was the principal cause of his eye disease, he said to him at one of his visits, "Father, pray cease weeping; otherwise you will completely lose your sight." The saint's reply was worthy of him. "What! brother," he replied, "to preserve this corporal sight which is common to us with flies, shall I expose myself to the loss of the effusions of the divine light! No, I shall never consent, were it only for an instant!"

To testify his gratitude to the physician, Francis invited him to share the Friars' dinner; and as the latter represented that they had nothing fit to offer a man of his position, "Go," said he, "and have confidence." At that very moment a basket of excellent meats, which a lady living nearly two leagues off sent the servant of

God, was brought in. Francis had them served up for his guest, who could not refrain from telling the religious, "Brothers, we do not think highly enough of our invalid's sanctity; and you, who are his familiars, cannot conceive to what a degree divine virtue dwells in him."

The physician's good offices did not remain unrewarded. A magnificent mansion he had just built was already cracking and threatening to fall. He resolved to have recourse to supernatural means; and, having obtained a lock of hair from the saint, put it in a crevice in the wall. His faith obtained a miracle; the next morning the crevice had disappeared and the walls closed up firmly.

The course of events brings before us another prodigy, which is as saddening as the others are consoling, and proves once more that the most astounding miracles do not suffice to convert the very persons who are the object of them. We will give it just as we find it in S. Bonaventure, and in the same spirit, in order that it may serve for ever as a lesson to future generations. The Church reproves scandals wherever she discovers them, and when they find their way even into the heart of the sanctuary, is the first to raise her voice against the culprits. But there is an infinite distance between her conduct and that of unbelievers. Unbelievers hate good and rejoice at the downfall of souls; the Church, on the contrary, always feels she is a mother, weeps over her erring children, strives to bring them back to the line of duty and, as soon as they return, presses them affectionately to her breast—she is all mercy and charity. The Patriarch of Assisi drew his inspiration on every occasion from these sentiments of our mother the Church; witness his whole

apostolic life; witness, among others, the example to which we have just alluded. The occurrence took place at Rieti in one of the rooms of the episcopal palace, where Francis allowed himself to be removed after a short sojourn at Monte Colombo. They brought him a canon borne on a litter and almost expiring, who came to beg to be cured. Gideone (that was the canon's name), a frivolous, worldly-minded man, had up to that time led a life not very priestly; feeling stricken with a mortal malady, he began to dread the judgments of God, and, to escape the strokes of His justice, had recourse to the stigmatica of Monte Alverno, joined by the bishop and his friends. Francis, reading his very inmost heart like an open book, said, "How can God cure you when you unceasingly outrage Him? However, on account of the pure souls who plead your cause, I shall beg Him to have pity on you. But, take care; woe to you if you return to your vomit! For ingratitude is a hot wind that dries up the source of grace." After this warning, he made the sign of the Cross over the sick man, who immediately rose up, praising God and crying out, "I am cured." Need we add that the unhappy man paid no heed to the saint's threats? Having relapsed into his disorderly life he was quickly punished. He died miserably, crushed under the roof of a house that fell in upon him. Oh, mystery of justice! Oh, the depth of God's judgments! *

As to the saint, surmounting by an heroic effort the fever and sufferings that oppressed him, he tried to resume his long-interrupted course of missions. It was towards the close of the year 1225. Francis bade adieu to that hospitable town Rieti, and set out, accom-

* S. Bonaventure, chap. xi.

panied by some of his Friars, to consecrate his remaining strength to running after the stray sheep like the Good Shepherd. God seemed to present him as a spectacle to the faithful people of Umbria, Latium, and the two Sicilies, in order to recall to their minds the grand scene on Calvary. What sinner, however hardened, would not be softened at the sole sight of such a saint? Who could have resisted the double influence of his language and his invincible charity? In fine, who could have doubted the authenticity of his mission, when he was scattering miracles broadcast and bore upon his body the visible impression of the sacred stigmata? We would never get to the end of it, if we enumerated all the prodigies and conversions that he accomplished. Among so many remarkable occurrences we will confine ourselves to relating two,* the latter being of the highest historical importance.

At Celano in the Abruzzi a soldier came of his own accord to offer our apostles the hospitality of his home and invite them to dine with him, and was so pressing that Francis could not avoid accepting. The saint, having said grace, suddenly turned towards his host and whispered in his ear, "Brother, I have yielded to your entreaties, and here I am in your house. Now listen to my advice and follow it. Confess your sins at once with the greatest compunction; for this very day the Lord will repay you for the good you have done to His poor." The soldier believed the saint, received absolution from his companion, made his will, and seriously prepared to appear before God. Then, having seated himself at table with his guests, he was stricken with sudden death. Thus was accomplished not only the saint's prophecy, but also that

* S. Bonaventure.

promise of the Gospel, "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive the reward of a prophet." *

It is probably at this epoch of his life the indefatigable apostle, passing through Bagnarea in Tuscany, miraculously cured a child of four years, then within an ace of death and given over by the physicians. The parents of the little invalid, Giovanni di Fidenza and Maria Ritelli, both distinguished for their nobility and still more by their piety, turning their eyes to heaven, had recourse to the merits and intercession of Francis of Assisi, whom all Italy was already invoking as a saint. Donna Ritelli made a vow of giving her little Giovanni to the Order of Friars Minors if he was restored to health. Our saint, moved by the mother's tears, prayed, and her son was restored to her perfectly cured.† Then, at the sight of this child of miracle, the angelic beauty of his countenance and the lofty destinies God reserved for him in the Church, he exclaimed, as if he had found the treasure he was seeking, "*Oh, buona ventura!*" Bonaventure is the name under which the son of Giovanni di Fidenza will be known by the whole world, which he will bear as a religious, as Cardinal-Bishop of Albano, and under which he will be canonised by Sixtus IV. (1582). After declaring the miracle, let us admire the marvellous designs of Providence in this encounter. Francis and Bonaventure, what glorious names! One is the founder of the three Orders of Penitence; the other is their restorer and, as it were, second father. The holy

* S. Matt. x. 41.

† S. Bonaventure himself recalls this miracle in the preface to his *Legend*. "I would be taxed with ingratitude," he says, "if I did not publish the life and virtues of him who snatched me in my childhood from the gates of death."

Patriarch restored the Church which was falling into ruin; the seraphic Doctor will be its luminary. They have each their special mission and special virtues; but both belong to the family of seraphic souls, both shine with immortal splendour in the invisible firmament of the elect; and of those two stars one was then just rising, and the other setting.

Francis, in fact, was breaking down under the burden of apostolic labours, added to his bodily infirmities and the rigours of the season (it was then in the depth of winter, 1225). The malady soon became so grave that his companions, apprehending the worst, led him back in all haste to his native city. Dom. Guido wanted to accommodate him in his own palace; but in vain did he lavish the greatest care upon him, the disease resisted all his efforts. In the following spring, Friar Elias sent the saint to breathe the air of Siena, milder than that of Assisi; not that the Vicar-General was deceived as to the condition of the seraphic Father, since, when he was at Foligno in 1224, he was warned in a mysterious dream that Francis had only two more years of suffering to pass on earth, but he wished to at least soothe the last years of his exile. The sick man slowly wended his way along the greyish, monotonous low-lying slopes that extend as far as the proud and populous city of Siena,* which, decked with all the charms of spring, lay spread out between the sheltering hills as if emerging from a bouquet of flowers. Francis breathed the pure and invigorating air of hill and dale but without deriving any relief; change of scene, attendance, and remedies, all were useless. The wounds of the stigmata still crucified his innocent flesh; his lungs were affected, his stomach

* At that epoch Siena counted more than 150,000 inhabitants.

worn out, his blindness almost complete. The Sienese physicians also applied fire to the temples, an operation which had no other result than to open their eyes to the miracle of Monte Colombo. A few days after he was seized with a vomiting of blood, which reduced him to the last extremity. His weeping companions gathered around his couch, and, like the disciples of S. Martin, said, "Father, who will teach us if you leave us? Who will console us? Ah! leave us at least a supreme pledge of your paternal affection, and give us your blessing as a protection against our enemies." The holy Patriarch, deeply moved, calls Friar Benedict of Pirra, his chaplain and infirmarian, and in a dying voice, but with perfect serenity of mind, pronounces the following words:—"Priest of the Most High, write down the benediction I give to all my brethren, not only to all those who are now in the Order, but also all those who shall enter it in the future to the end of ages. Here are my last wishes: Let al the brethren always love one another, as I have neve ceased and do not cease to love them. Let them alway faithfully cherish and observe holy poverty, my Lad and my Sovereign. In fine, let them be always sub missive to the prelates of the Order and the clerics c our Mother the holy Church. May the blessing c God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, rest upon them Amen."

On receiving this letter, Friar Elias no longe doubted that the final hour was at hand. He hurrie to Siena, and, at the saint's wish, brought him bac almost dying to Umbria. Dom. Guido, Francis's frien and protector to the last, lodged him in his palac around which the magistrates of Assisi posted guar who kept watch day and night, for fear they shoul

take away so precious a relic as a body honoured with the sacred stigmata.*

As to our invalid, far from fearing death—that funereal messenger whose very name freezes other men with dread—he smiled upon him, as one friend smilingly greets another. Was it not going to open to him the gates of the City of Peace, and introduce him into the presence of his Beloved? So there appeared in the midst of his agony glimpses of an indescribable joy which was not of this world. And although his sufferings were so acute and continuous that, as he avowed, it had seemed to him more tolerable to go to execution, still he had firmness enough to console those who surrounded him. Whence did he derive that superhuman energy? The following incident will tell.

One day when he was suffering unusual pain, a little brother-infirmarian, moved to compassion, said, "Father, pray to the Lord to treat you a little more gently! It seems that His hand rests too heavily upon you." "If I did not know thy simplicity and the uprightness of thy intentions," replied Francis with holy indignation, "I would be horrified to remain near thee, who findest fault with the judgments of God upon me." And immediately, summoning all his strength, he flung himself on the stone floor with such violence that his suffering limbs were bruised by the shock; then, kissing the ground, he exclaimed, "Lord, I give You thanks for all my sufferings. Increase them a hundredfold, if it is Your good pleasure; for my only happiness is to accomplish Your most holy will." All the saint is depicted in those few words. To love God ungrudgingly, to do His most holy will in everything, and place

* The robbery of relics was of frequent occurrence at that epoch.

all his happiness in that—there is the key to his beautiful life and his beautiful death.

Feeling that the term of his pilgrimage was approaching and that his bodily tent would soon be struck, he gathered his disciples round his couch, and, like Jacob, extended his hands over them in the form of a cross, blessing all the children of his love. He asked upon what brow his right hand rested? "It is on the head of Brother Elias," they replied. "It is well," he continued. "I bless thee, my son, in all and above all; as under thy hand the Most High has multiplied my children, so I bless them all in thee. May God, the Sovereign Lord of all things, bless thee in heaven and on earth! For my part, I bless thee as well and more than I can, and conjure Him who can do all things to make up for my impotence; may He remember thy works, may He hear all thy wishes, may He give thee part one day in the reward of the just!" At Friar Elias's last hour God remembered the prayer and merits of the dying saint.

Francis could not forget his dear daughters at S. Damien's, and sent S. Clare and her companions a last benediction with a letter full of the most touching exhortations. All these fine traits of the most exquisite charity show us the amiable Francis of Assisi, who could say of his spiritual children what, still young, he said of the poor, "I bear them all in my heart;" and we recognise therein the sign of true piety, for it is the property of religion to transform all that it touches, to elevate our thoughts, and to purify, magnify, and perfect all the legitimate affections in supernaturalising them. After thus invoking Heaven's favours upon his immense family, he begged his brethren to transport him to S. Mary of Angels, ground hallowed beyond all others, the cradle of his Order and his favourite retreat; "for

he wished," says S. Bonaventure, "to breathe the last breath of his mortal life in that very sanctuary where he had received the divine inbreathing of grace." It was towards the close of September 1226. The saint was borne thither on a litter; and when they reached the plain about halfway between the town and the convent, he asked if they were opposite the hospice where, in the beginning of his conversion, he loved so much to tend the lepers. On their replying in the affirmative, "Turn me towards the city," said he; and then, raising himself with an effort, his left arm resting on one of the Friars, his right stretched out towards Assisi and his eyes uplifted to heaven, he pronounced these solemn words—

"Benedicta tu, civitas, a Domino,
Quia per te multæ animæ salvabuntur,
Et in te multi servi Altissimi habitabunt;
Et de te multi eligentur ad regnum æternum.
Pax ✠ tibi." *

With all these benedictions is linked a name full of pleasing memories for S. Francis and our readers, the name of his great benefactress in Rome, Giacomina di Settesoli. As soon as he reached Portiuncula he dictated the following letter to her, in which he prophesies the day of his death:—"Know, my very dear daughter, that the ever-blessed Christ has revealed to me the approaching end of my days. If therefore you wish to see me again in this world, set out immediately upon receipt of this missive and hasten to S. Mary of Angels. If you arrive later than Saturday you will find me dead. Bring with you a hair shirt as a shroud for my body,

* "Blessed of the Lord be thou, O city, for through thee many souls will be saved, and in thee many servants of the Most High will dwell, and from thee will be chosen for the eternal kingdom. Peace be to thee."

and wax tapers for my interment. I also beg of you to bring some of the pastry you made me take to Rome when I was ill." At these words he paused like a man interrupted by an unexpected visit, and then went on: "It is useless to send this letter; the Donna Settesoli is on her way." In fact, she arrived shortly after with her two sons, bringing with her all the saint wanted, according to a formal order given her by an angel.*

By a singular exception, due to the illustrious lady's devotedness, the holy Patriarch ordered her to be introduced within the monastic inclosure along with her two sons. It was a great consolation to her to be admitted to contemplate the stigmatisé of Alverno, to lavish every attention upon him, to kiss the bleeding wounds in his feet and water them with her tears—a consolation merited by her inexhaustible charity to the poor of Jesus Christ. On Wednesday morning (September 30), as she was speaking of sending away a portion of her suite, the sick man stopped her. "My daughter," said he, "wait for four days longer; and when you shall have paid the last honours to this poor body, you may return to Rome with all your people." The saint's advice was to her an order, which she hastened to obey.

The next day (October 1) Francis assembled all the religious in the convent, gave them his benediction again, and, as a symbol of fraternal union, divided among them a loaf which he had blessed with the sign of the Cross. Friar Elias alone, in his excessive grief, would not eat his portion, which Brother Leo, who asked it from him, piously preserved; and the chronicles relate that it subsequently served to cure a crowd of sick persons. All the brethren were weeping. The

* Bernard of Besse.

Seraphic Father beckoned his two first-born sons, Bernardo di Quintavalle and Egidio (Peter of Catana, the second of his disciples, had already returned to God) to draw nigh. "Come, my sons," said he, "come, until I bless you before I die!" and crossing his hands over their heads he blessed them with a special benediction.

On Friday evening (October 2) he made a sign to the Friars to approach his bedside. His body was in the last extremity, but his mind retained the full possession of its faculties; the lamp of life was breaking, but the light of intelligence still shone with a pure and steady ray. At that supreme hour he dictated his last testament, a burning effusion of love he let fall from his faltering lips, a masterly work in which he himself has depicted in grand lines the different phases of his life. Fra Angelo of Rieti wrote, while the other religious listened with an emotion it is easy to conceive:

"The Lord hath given to me, Brother Francis, the grace to thus begin to do penance. When I was leading my life of sin, the sight of the lepers was very repulsive to me; but the Lord led me into their midst and I practised mercy in their regard; and when I came away from them, what had seemed bitter to me was changed for me into sweetness for soul and body. After that I still lingered a little while, and then quitted the world; and the Lord gave me such faith in the sanctity of churches that I adored Him therein in all simplicity, and said, 'We adore you, O Most Holy Lord Jesus, here and in all your churches all over the earth, and bless you for having redeemed the world by your holy Cross.' Afterwards the Lord gave and still gives me such a vivid faith in his priests who live according to

the law of the Holy Roman Church, on account of their character, that even if they persecuted me I would have recourse to them. If I meet secular priests, had I the wisdom of Solomon, and if they had only the smallest parish in the world to govern, I would not preach in their churches without their consent. I wish to respect, love, and honour them and all others as my lords. And let them not speak to me of their sins; for I discern in them the Son of God, and as priests they are my masters. I act thus, because I regard nothing in this world that falls under my senses, of this same Most High Son of God, unless His adorable Body and Blood which they consecrate and receive, and that they alone have the power to administer to the faithful. I wish to honour and revere above all the Eucharistic mysteries, and that the Sacred Host be placed in precious ciboriums and tabernacles. As to the Holy Name of the Lord and the words of the Gospel, if I find them in unbecoming places I remove them, and put them in a more suitable place, and pray others to do the same. We should also honour and respect all theologians, and those who dispense to us the bread of the Divine Word, as being for us conduits of the spiritual life.

"When the Lord gave me Brothers, no one taught me what to do; but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I was to live according to the Rule of the Holy Gospel. I caused it to be written out briefly and simply, and the Holy Father confirmed it. Those who came to embrace this kind of life gave everything they had to the poor. We were content with a single habit patched within and without according to each one's liking, adding thereto the cord and outer garments; and we did not wish for anything more. We said the office like other clerics; the lay brothers said the *Pater*

Nosters. We dwelt in poor and abandoned churches, and were simple and submissive to all. I worked with my hands, and I wish to work still; and I likewise command all my brethren to take up some honest handicraft. Let those who do not know how to work, learn—not to earn a paltry salary, but to give a good example and to fly idleness. If they do not give you the value of your labour, have recourse to the table of the Lord, asking alms from door to door. God has revealed to me this salutation which we should use, 'The Lord give you His peace!'

"Let the brethren take care not to accept churches, houses, and buildings constructed for them, if they are not conformable to the holy poverty we have embraced in our Rule; and after accepting them, let them always remain there as strangers and travellers.

"I absolutely forbid all the brethren, in the name of obedience, and wherever they may be, to ask any privilege from the Roman Court, by themselves or through any intermediary, either for a church or for any place whatsoever, or under pretext of preaching, or even to shelter themselves from persecutions. If they are not received in one place, let them go into another to do penance, with the blessing of God.

"I wish absolutely to obey the Minister-General of this fraternity, and the guardian he shall be pleased to give me; and I desire to be so bound by him that I can do nothing without his permission, because he is my master. Although I am simple and weak, I wish, however, to have always a cleric who shall say the office with me according to the prescriptions of the Rule. If there is any brother who does not recite the office according to the Rule, and who wants to introduce changes into it, or who is not a Catholic, let all the

religious, wherever they meet him, be bound by obedience to bring him before the nearest guardian; and let the latter be likewise bound to keep him day and night as a prisoner, without letting him out of his hands until he has personally handed him over to the Minister-General. Let the Minister be bound in turn, in virtue of holy obedience, to send him under conduct of the brethren, who shall guard him day and night as a prisoner, until they shall have brought him to the Cardinal of Ostia, who is master, protector, and corrector of this fraternity.

"And let not the brethren say, 'This is another Rule;' for it is only a memento, a warning, an exhortation, my testament in fact, which I, Brother Francis, your little servant, bequeath to you, my blessed brethren, in order that we should the more exactly observe the Rule we have solemnly embraced. Let the Minister-General, and all the other ministers and guardians, be bound by obedience to add nothing to, nor take nothing from the Rule. Let them always carry about them this writing attached to the Rule; and in every Chapter they shall hold, after having read the Rule, let them also read these words. I absolutely forbid all my brethren, clerics, and lay brothers, in virtue of obedience, to make commentaries on the Rule and on this writing, saying, 'They should be understood thus;' but as the Lord has given me the grace to dictate them both purely and simply, let them understand them likewise purely, simply, and without glossary, and put them in practice to the end of their lives. And may whosoever shall observe these things be filled in heaven and on earth with the benediction of the Heavenly Father, of His Beloved Son, and of the Most Holy Paraclete, and of all the heavenly Virtues, and all the saints. And I,

Brother Francis, your very little servant in our Lord, confirm you as far as I can, at home and abroad, this most holy benediction. Amen."

The Friars could never tire of admiring the perfect lucidity of mind, the unalterable patience, that continual union with God, those touching exhortations the Seraphic Father was still murmuring in an almost inaudible voice on that memorable evening of the 2d of October. And if we call to mind in the midst of what anguish he preserved that freshness of thought, that serenity of mind, we cannot refrain from sharing their admiration; the tears rush to the eyes, and we fall upon our knees to thank God for having crowned the life of such a man by so beautiful an ending, and ordered Death to respect to the last moment his mental faculties, as He has often defended against the corruption of the tomb the bodies of the saints, the virginal purity of which was never sullied by evil.

The next day, Saturday, the Immaculate Virgin, to whom Francis had specially consecrated this day at the famous Chapter of Mats, procured him in return a grace the Christian is accustomed to consider as the Lord's most excellent gift and miracle of miracles—holy communion. It was to be for him the last, and the prelude to the eternal communion in heaven. Fortified with the Bread of the strong, anointed with the oil of the dying, he directed his thoughts even beyond death; and in order that his mortal remains—his brother the body, as he called it—should be forgotten by men, he designated beforehand the *Colle d'inferno* (Hill of Hell), where criminals were executed, as his place of sepulture; he had such a hunger and thirst of contempt and humiliation! He was thus destined in death, as in life, to be the perfect image of the Word Incarnate!

At the moment when the crests of the Apennines were beginning to cast their shadows across the plain, he gathered his disciples for the last time around his pallet to console and bless them, saying, "Farewell, my children, farewell to you all! I leave you in the fear of the Lord; abide therein always. The time of trial and tribulation is not far distant. Happy those who shall persevere in the good they have begun! As for me, I am going to God, I am hastening to meet Him, and I commend you all to His grace." * Who shall depict for us the Father's affectionate love and the profound emotion of his children while he was speaking thus? As soon as he bade them farewell, he forgot the earth, and thought only of heaven. Still, at his desire, and as if the more readily to raise his mind to God, Brothers Angelo and Leo sang the Canticle of the Sun and his sister Death, whom he thus welcomed. Then, having taken off his habit, and covered only with a hair-shirt, he had himself laid on the ground strewn with ashes, thinking that his body would soon become dust and ashes itself, and still more intending to thus remain faithful to his last sigh to his Lady Poverty. The Friars, interpreting his meaning, gave him a habit and cord, which he put on with every sentiment of gratitude. Then having caused the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to S. John, to be read to him, he entoned Psalm cxli., which begins with a cry of distress and ends with a cry of hope.

* The old biographers of our saint imitated S. Athanasius in his life of S. Anthony, Sulpicius Severus in his life of S. Martin, and a hundred other hagiographers, who do not speak of the reception of the last sacraments. But how can we suppose that a saint, warned two years beforehand of the hour of his death, did not conform to the laws and usages of the Church on this subject? (See Chalippe.)

"I cried to the Lord with my voice: with my voice I made supplication to the Lord.

In His sight I pour out my prayer, and before Him I declare my trouble.

When my spirit failed me, then Thou knewest my paths.

In this way wherein I walked they have hidden a snare for me.

I looked on my right hand and beheld: and there was no one that would know me.

Flight hath failed me, and there is no one that hath regard to my soul.

I cried to Thee, O Lord; I said: Thou art my hope, my portion in the land of the living.

Attend to my supplication: for I am brought very low.

Deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I.

Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name: the just wait for me until Thou reward me."

At these words his mouth closed for ever, and his soul fled to the bosom of God. It was the 3d of October, about an hour after sunset, on one of those calm, balmy autumn evenings only to be enjoyed in Italy.

What a beautiful death! How it relieves the mind's eye in the midst of so many scenes of barbarism that ensanguined the early half of the thirteenth century! In place of startling the soul, it fills it with a pleasing emotion, and involuntarily reminds us of that sentence in our holy books: "If there is no sight in this world more heartrending than the death of the impious man, there is none more consoling than the end of the just." Of all others, there is an incomparable charm about that

of Francis. It seems at first sight that Bernardone's son was gathered before his time, like a premature fruit: he had just entered on his forty-fifth year! But if we take into account that maxim of the wise man, that a stainless life is always a long life, we will be obliged to recognise that he was loaded with years and merits, and was a fruit ripe for heaven. In effect, in less than twenty years he had surpassed the macerations of the ascetics of the Thebaïd, the labours of apostolic men, and the sufferings of the martyrs; in less than twenty years he had founded three religious families, reformed the manners of his age, and consolidated the reign of Christ in the greater part of Christendom. None perhaps among the children of men received from on high a more sublime vocation, none better corresponded thereto. Again, to do him justice, we must not take into account only his personal works, but also those which his teaching and example have inspired or will inspire to the end of time. However that may be, he remains—and it is his special prerogative—the most perfect image of the Saviour, whether in his birth, his public life, or his sufferings on Monte Alverno, or even, to a certain extent, in the marvels that followed his death.

Hail, courageous athlete of the faith! Hail, martyr of love, adorned with the purple of the sacred stigmata! Thou art that just one who flourishes like the palm-tree and multiplies like the cedar of Lebanon. Henceforth thou shalt have a place apart in the records of the Church, and above all in the hearts of thy children, where thy memory will live from generation to generation.

CHAPTER XIX.

Obsequies of S. Francis—His Canonisation—Translation of his Relics—Splendours of his Tomb.

The mysteries of grace in Francis were consummated; the mysteries of his glory had begun. The moment he expired, a multitude of those larks he loved and invited to celebrate along with him the praises of the Creator, descended upon the roof of Our Lady of Angels, and sang with marvellous sweetness, as if to celebrate his crowning in heaven. Friar Augustin of Assisi, Provincial of the province of Capua, a man of merit and exalted sanctity, saw the saint's soul ascend to heaven in the form of a brilliant star; and, raising himself with an effort from his bed of pain, cried, "Father, wait for me; I am going with you!" and his soul, rending its frail bodily case, followed that of his blessed Father. S. Francis likewise appeared to his illustrious friend, Dom Guido, then on a pilgrimage to Monte Gargano, and said, "I am quitting this land of exile, and going home." * All these events took place on the night of the 3d of October.

The body was a priceless relic, which the Friars carefully embalmed, in order that the earth might long guard so rich a treasure; the pious Giacomina di Settesoli defraying all the expenses of embalming and inhumation.† They deposited the heart and entrails in

* S. Bonaventure.

† In reward for her piety, Donna Settesoli (1239), and after her, her two sons, both Roman senators, were interred in the basilica of the Sacro Convento.

the church of Our Lady of Angels. The little cell wherein Francis had breathed forth his soul to God, and which is near the sanctuary, was transformed into a mortuary chapel; and the body, clothed in a new habit, open at the left side, and surrounded with essences and perfumes, with which mingled celestial odour, was laid out upon magnificent carpets, to be exposed to the veneration of the people.

The news flashed with the rapidity of lightning through the whole town of Assisi. "The saint is dead! The saint is dead!" was the cry on all sides. The inhabitants at once rushed to Portiuncula to venerate the mortal remains of one whom they had invoked even during his life, to gaze upon them at leisure and satisfy their devotion. "In proportion as Francis had been humble and lowly," says S. Bonaventure, "so much the more pleasure did God take in glorifying him immediately after his death. His soul had crossed the threshold of heaven, but, in quitting his body, it had left a certain pledge of its future destiny—we mean the privilege of the sacred stigmata, a privilege unheard of since the early ages of the Church, and which made him the image of Jesus glorious and arisen, after being the type of Jesus suffering. They saw the miraculously-formed fleshy nails in his hands and feet, which were so adherent that, pressed at one side, they protruded at the other like hard, strong, compact sinews. Nothing prevented them seeing the wound in the side (which he concealed so carefully during his life)—that wound not made by the hand of man, and which called to mind that of the Lord Jesus. The nails had the greyish colour of iron; but the lateral wound, vermilion-coloured, and with its edges folded back, resembled a beautiful fresh-blown rose.

The saint's naturally brownish and somewhat tawny complexion had recovered the brilliancy and freshness of early youth, and his limbs the elasticity of childhood —so many symbols of the purity of his soul! One had said, another Christ descended from the cross and ready to be entombed!

"Among the faithful who came to kiss the stigmata was a noted famous cavalier, named Jerome, incredulous like the Apostle S. Thomas, who minutely examined and felt the five wounds of the blessed Father, and, like him too, was freed from all doubts on the subject, and subsequently became one of the warmest defenders of the authenticity of the miracle. During the whole night the religious, tertiaries, and friends of the saint chanted in turn psalms and canticles before his mortal remains, so that one would have thought he was assisting at the feast of an angel rather than the obsequies of a man."

The next day, Sunday (October 4th)—blessed day when the Church celebrates the glory of Christ triumphant over death—took place the obsequies, or rather the triumph, of His faithful servant. Let us leave it to an eyewitness, Thomas of Celano, to describe the imposing sight.

In the morning the clergy and chief magistrates of Assisi went down to Our Lady of Angels to solemnly remove the remains of their fellow-townsman. The whole town was there. In addition, an innumerable crowd, who had thronged from all parts of Umbria, overspread the plain. The procession was headed by military trumpeters according to the custom of the time; then came the faithful bearing olive branches, and after them the Friars holding lighted torches in their

* S. Bonaventure.

hands. Two magistrates and two Friars Minors bore the body on their shoulders, the clergy closing the cortège and chanting the psalms and hymns of the Church. Providence permitted that in place of taking the most direct road they should select the by-way that leads to the Convent of San Damiano, where they deposited the body in the chapel of the Poor Ladies in order that they might have the consolation of contemplating for the last time the transfigured countenance of their holy founder. They opened the grating through which they gave holy communion; and the sick Abbess, carried in the arms of her daughters, could venerate, touch, and kiss, not without an abundant shedding of tears, the five wounds of the stigmatisé of Alverno. She tried to pull out one of the miraculous nails to preserve it as a relic; but seeing that she could not succeed, was content to saturate a piece of linen with the blood that was flowing from the wound, and take the exact measure of the saint's height, to have his portrait painted for the nuns' choir.

When the funeral procession again moved on, the servants of Christ broke out into lamentations; no orphan, weeping over her mother's tomb, ever gave utterance to such heartrending groans. "Oh, bitter separation!" they cried, sobbing. "O Father! our Father, what shall we do? What will become of us? All our happiness is fled with you!" Thus, their hearts were divided between sadness and joy; sadness at having lost one whom they loved, and the joy of knowing he was already crowned in heaven. However, they brought away the precious relics, and the convent door closed, never again to open on such a sorrowful occasion.*

Through the streets of Assisi, hung with drapery

* Thomas of Celano.

and green garlands, the cortège moved on as far as the church of S. George, where it stopped. "It was there our saint was initiated into the study of Christian literature; it was there he first preached penance and the love of God; and there was to be his first place of rest."* The body was there deposited in a cypress shrine, which the piety of the faithful had provided for the Knight of seraphic poverty.

Friar Elias, Vicar-General of the Order and successor of S. Francis, hastened to acquaint all the superiors with the news of his death. His letter, written under the influence of deep emotion, is a model of a funeral oration; and it is to us a pleasure as well as a duty to reproduce its most important passages.

"Before beginning to speak, I weep, and not without reason. Sorrow fills my soul like a swollen torrent. Alas! the misfortune I dreaded has fallen upon us: he who consoled us is no more. Beloved of God and men, he has ascended to the sojourn of light, he who taught Jacob the law of knowledge and life, and bequeathed to Israel the testament of peace. We cannot rejoice too much on his account; we cannot weep too much for ourselves, deprived as we are of his presence, and, as it were, buried in the shadow of death. It is a loss to all; the peril is mine alone, because of the care and affliction that overwhelm me. My sorrow is unbounded; for that reason, brethren, I conjure you to share it as I share yours. We are orphans and deprived of the light of our eyes. Yes, our Father was truly a light to us and the people of this age, a light sent by the true Light, that enlighteneth all men seated in darkness and in the shadow of death, to direct their feet in the 'way of peace.'

* S. Bonaventure.

Like the noontide sun he enlightened minds and warmed hearts with the fire of his love, preaching everywhere the Kingdom of God, and preparing for the Lord a new generation. His name has gone abroad to the most distant islands, and all lands have admired his works. Do not give way to excessive grief; for God, who is the Father of orphans, will not deny us His strengthening consolations. Besides, Francis has gone to a better life; and before dying he blessed all his children like another Jacob, forgiving them all the faults they may have committed against him. And now I have to tell you of a great joy and a prodigy hitherto unheard of—it is that shortly before his death, our Father received and bore in his flesh the stigmata of Jesus crucified. Bless, then, the God of heaven and earth, praise Him for His everlasting mercy, and remember our venerable Father in God. Pray for him—it was his last wish; and invoke him in order to deserve to participate in his grace. He died on Saturday evening, the 3d of October, one hour after nightfall. Pray to him to put at our head another like himself, a valiant chief like the Machabees, to lead us to the fight. And because it is a wholesome thought to pray for the dead, pray for the repose of his soul. Each priest will say three Masses, each cleric the psalter, the lay brothers a hundred *Paters:* the clerics will chant with solemnity the office for the dead.—BROTHER ELIAS, *sinner.*"

One is glad to find such an eulogium of the saint coming from the mouth of Friar Elias, whose evidence is above suspicion.

In obedience to his last wishes, the Friars put no epitaph on his tomb; but the Most High rendered it for ever famous, for ever eloquent by reason of the

prodigies wrought thereon. Is it not a wonderful condescension and the most inimitable mark of true sanctity, this power given to the elect of working miracles after death? For the sinner, all glory vanishes at the threshold of the tomb. For the just, on the contrary, death opens up a new era; his ashes not only contain the germ of a blessed resurrection and immortality—they become, when it pleases God, a centre of supernatural life and activity. So, with the Penitent of Assisi, his tomb was hardly closed when miracles multiplied—and what miracles! Here, it is a young girl of Assisi whose head is twisted round to her shoulder, and who rises up cured. There, it is an old man, a friend and fellow-townsman of the saint, who was blind for five years, and who suddenly recovers his sight. At Capua, a child playing on the banks of the Volturno, falls into the river and is drowned. Presently a crowd collects round the corpse; Christians, and the Jews themselves, moved by the grief of the child's father, invoke the name of Francis, and the dead child is instantaneously raised to life, throws himself into his father's arms, and begs to be taken to the church of the holy Patriarch to whom he recognised himself indebted for his life. At Pennaco a mother weeps over the corpse of her only daughter, and puts off the funeral in the hope that S. Francis will not abandon her in such an affliction. Her prayer is not in vain; the saint appears and restores to her her daughter full of life and health. Another prodigy still more surprising. At Monte Marino, near Benevento, a woman had just expired, and the clerics were already reciting the office for the dead around her funeral couch. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, she raises the shroud, calls one of the priests, her god-

father, and says, "Father, I want to go to confession. After death I was reserved for the eternal punishment of exterior darkness for having concealed a mortal sin in confession. Thanks to the intercession of S. Francis of Assisi, for whom I have always had the greatest devotion, God has sent me back to earth to complete my confession. As soon as you shall have heard and absolved me, I shall go to the sojourn of rest which I have been promised." She tremblingly confesses to the priest, who trembles still more than herself; and as soon as she had received the divine forgiveness, fell to sleep again; this time in the kiss of the Lord, and for ever.*

The seraphic Doctor, in his *Legend*, relates a hundred other facts not less attested, nor less conclusive. What conclusion is to be drawn from this manifest supernatural intervention of Providence, unless that God thus accredited His servant's sanctity and the supplicatory cultus everywhere paid him? Such was the conclusion drawn by popular devotion, and nothing was more logical. Still it needed another sanction, that of a tribunal which is the Voice of God on earth, whose dogmatic decrees are infallible, and whose authorisation is absolutely necessary to raise one to the honours of the altars—it needed the sanction of the Roman Church, to which alone it belongs to recognise and proclaim the sanctity of her children, perhaps the brightest jewel in the Pontifical crown. By that sovereign act Rome takes the persecuted, the little ones, the outcasts of this world, and places them above all others, and, investing them with the double aureola of patrons and models in the sight of their brethren, awards them the

* St. Bonaventure.

most glorious immortality that the human mind can conceive.

They had not long to wait for this judgment of the Holy See. Honorius III. died on the 18th of March 1227. The next day Cardinal Ugolino was elected Pope by acclamation, and ascended the chair of Peter under the name of Gregory IX. Thus the nascent order of Friars Minors lost one protector to find another not less devoted.

Providence reserved to Gregory IX., as a consolation in his old age and a source of fortitude in his trials, the honour and joy of proclaiming the heroic virtues of the Seraphic Patriarch. The beginning of his pontificate was stormy. In the Easter of 1228 a sedition, fomented by the emissaries of the Emperor of Germany and abetted by that aristocratic Roman faction who have always been jealous of the Papal power, constrained the august old man to take the road to exile. He sought a refuge in the midst of the faithful people of Umbria, first at Rieti and then at Spoleto, from whence he repaired to Assisi to visit the Convent of the Poor Ladies of San Damiano, and perhaps still more to recommend the storm-tossed barque of Peter to their holy founder. At the entreaties of the inhabitants, who with an unanimous voice urged him to inscribe in the catalogue of saints him whom they called "the angel of Assisi, the apostle of Italy, the great wonder-worker of his age," he directed the customary procedures to be immediately begun. Before leaving for Perugia, whither his contests with Frederick II. summoned him, he charged the bishops of Umbria to make the juridical inquiry into the teaching and acts of Francis in their respective dioceses, and named a special commission,

composed of cardinals the least favourable to the cause,* to examine all the documents of the process.

The ordinary delay in cases of beatification was abridged, a measure which will surprise no one, since the fame of our saint's miracles was noised abroad all over Christendom, and the witnesses were still living. The Vicar of Jesus Christ, acting with that maturity which the Church brings to all questions of faith and discipline, examined the validity of the procedure himself in full consistory, approved the reports, and, in the plenitude of his apostolic authority, fixed Sunday, July 16, 1228, for the solemnity of canonization.

On the eve of this solemnity he quitted Perugia, escorted by his whole court, to make his solemn entry into the saint's native place. Thomas of Celano records with delight with what transports of joy the old town opened its gates to him, in the midst of what enthusiasm it led him to the episcopal palace, and how it was obliged on that day to extend its area, too narrow to contain the crowds of noblemen, mitred abbots, prelates, and people whom the announcement of this fête had attracted from all parts of Italy.

The next day, Sunday, the Sovereign Pontiff repaired with great pomp to the church of S. George, where the blessed body lay, and which was decorated with the image and banner of the saint. After praying fervently, Gregory IX. ascended the throne which had been prepared for him, and was pleased to publish the praises of one of whom he had so long been the friend and protector, taking for his text the words of Ecclesiasticus: "'He shone in his days as the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and as the moon at the full. And as the sun when it shineth, so did he shine in the

* S. Bonaventure.

temple of God.'* The last head of the dragon waves the seventh standard, and breathing forth vengeance against heaven endeavours to seduce from their allegiance the greater number of the saints; but on the part of Christ a new champion appears, in whose blessed person the sacred symbol of redemption shines beauteous and resplendent. Francis, the noble prince, bears with him the royal signet; he assembles all the nations of the earth to wage war with the demon, and to defeat him institutes three companies of chosen warriors. Although his superior virtues would fully entitle us to consider him as already aggregated to the number of the saints, still these alone would not induce the Church to proclaim him canonized unless they were accompanied by miracles whose authenticity could not possibly be questioned. These indubitable testimonies of sanctity has the Almighty frequently manifested in favour of His chosen servant, and these likewise have been satisfactorily proved to those appointed by Us to test their veracity severely; therefore with the advice and consent of Our brethren have We determined to inscribe him in the calendar of saints, trusting in the divine mercy that he may become our powerful intercessor in heaven, whose exalted virtues we now venerate upon earth." When the Pope had concluded, Cardinal Octavian, cousin of Innocent III., contrary to usage, read out a list of miracles juridically proven, which gave rise to one of the most moving and perhaps unexampled scenes in history. Most of those upon whom those miracles had been wrought were present and openly proclaimed their authenticity, crying out, "That is true! that happened to me!"† while eyewitness of those selfsame prodigies or converted

* Eccl. l. 6, 7. † Thomas of Celano.

sinners who, notwithstanding the sanctity of the place, could not repress exclamations of joy and admiration, stood by. A second orator, Cardinal Rainerio Capoccio, who was intimately associated with the holy patriarchs, Dominic and Francis, related in turn what he knew of the latter's life. The assembly was moved to tears. Finally, the Sovereign Pontiff arose, and, with eyes and hands upraised to heaven, in presence of a rapt and riveted multitude, pronounced these solemn words :—

"To the glory of the Omnipotent God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the holy apostles Peter and Paul, and the honour of the Roman Church, We have resolved, by the advice of Our brethren the Cardinals and other prelates, to inscribe in the calendar of saints the blessed Father Francis, whom God has glorified in heaven and whom we venerate upon earth. His feast shall be celebrated on the 4th of October."

Then, laying aside the tiara, he entoned the *Te Deum* along with the Cardinals and Friars Minors, the people outside responding with vociferous acclamations, while pealing joy-bells spread far and wide the eagerly awaited news of the promulgation of the decree of canonization. Descending from his throne, the Pope subsequently prostrated himself before the new saint's shrine, which he reverentially kissed, depositing the customary offering, and then offered up the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass ; the sons of S. Francis, with lighted tapers and olive branches in their hands, encircling the altar and chanting in choir, "*Franciscus pauper et humilis, cœlum dives ingreditur ; hymnis cœlestibus honoratur.*" At the conclusion of Mass the Holy Father, having invoked the saint in a loud voice,

"*Ora pro nobis, beate Pater noster Francisce!*" gave the usual absolution and benediction. And all those splendours, having illuminated sunny Umbria with their brilliancy, were reflected by a solemn triduum in all the convents of the seraphic Order. Thus God steeped in glory him by whom glory was most contemned!

It will be seen, from this short sketch, if we were wrong in saying that Rome awards the just the most glorious immortality of which the human mind can form any conception. No; among sacred ceremonials, always so imposing, so superior to purely profane pageants, there is nothing comparable to that of the canonization of saints, nothing that more strikingly reveals to the world who is the true spouse of Christ. The Catholic Church alone makes saints, she alone has the power to crown them on earth, as the Son of Man alone has the power to crown them in heaven. And if she is great when by baptism she engenders them to the supernatural life, she seems to us still greater, more majestic, in a word, more divine, when, removing their ashes from the dust of the tomb, she proclaims their triumph, places them upon the Thabor of our altars, and invites all generations to sing with her, "Oh, how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory: for the memory thereof is immortal; because it is known both to God and men!" *

The canonization of saints is always an unique ovation held, so to speak, under the porticoes of the Eternal Temple. That of S. Francis, however, is rendered remarkable by several exceptional circumstances which we cannot silently pass over. It was the first time a Pope accomplished this great act on the very tomb of the saint. It was also the first time the

* Wisd. iv. 1.

Church pronounced a definitive judgment less than two years after death, Gregory IX. having not even followed the ordinary rules of procedure, since he canonised Francis without having first proclaimed him Venerable and Blessed. In fine—perhaps the most unheard-of thing in the history of Church pageants—Pica, Francis's old mother, assisted at this triumph! Happy mother who, in return for a life of sacrifice and immolation, tasted the sweetest reward a woman's ambition can receive in this world: she was crowned in her son!

Three days after the ceremony, Gregory IX. sent to all the bishops in the universe the Bull of Canonisation, dated Perugia, July 19, 1228, a Bull which is not only a monument of the highest authority, but also the most splendid panegyric of the saint.*

It will be remembered that Francis had designated the Colle d'Inferno as his place of sepulture. When Friar Elias set about executing the last wishes of his blessed Father the whole town cried out against him, regarding the selection of this site as an outrage on itself and on the memory of the most illustrious of its sons. It was necessary to appeal to the Pope, who approved Elias's ideas and plans; but by a truly admirable inspiration decreed that henceforward the Colle d'Inferno should be called the Colle del Paradiso. The consuls of Assisi, glad of this decision, joined the Colle del Paradiso to the other fiefs of the Holy See.†

* His zeal went further. He composed hymns and anthems in honour of S. Francis for the office of his feast, and directed Thomas of Celano to write his life, composed from information supplied by the saint's companions, and called the Legend of Gregory IX. (Chalippe, t. iii. liv. vi. p. 12.)

† The act of donation is of the 30th of March 1228, and signed

The Sovereign Pontiff directed Friar Elias to build a basilica worthy of the treasure it was to contain, blessed the first stone himself on the morrow of the solemnity of canonization, and emptied the Pontifical treasury to help on the completion of the edifice. The revolt of Frederick II. rendered those times calamitous for the Holy See. Having largely contributed out of his own funds, the Pope appealed to the generosity of the faithful, granting indulgences for each offering. Friar Elias, then Minister-General, aided by the most celebrated architect of that epoch, Giacómo Germano, pushed on the works with incredible rapidity. There is no doubt it was a gigantic enterprise. The Colle del Paradiso was nothing but one mass of more or less irregular rocks backed by the ramparts at the western extremity of the town. They had to dig up an enormous mountain to form the crypt to receive the tomb of S. Francis. On the granite summit of the hill, artistically levelled, they laid the solid foundations of a church in the Byzantine style, and an immense convent which, with its crenelated brick arches and overhanging terraces and cloisters, had all the appearance of a mediæval fortress.*

It may be said that the subterranean church contains as many marvels as stones. It seems to have started up out of the ground as if by enchantment; in two years it was almost entirely finished! Here truly

by one of the magistrates of the town, Simon Puzarelli (Archives of Assisi).

* This monastery has four grand cloisters. The western part overhangs a precipice with a gurgling torrent beneath. Nothing could be more beautiful than the gothic gallery to the south, whence the eye surveys the whole valley of the Tiber with its diadem of mountains. This gallery is the work of Sixtus IV., whose statue is niched in the wall surmounting the parapet.

is one of those architectural poems, one of those inimitable monuments, that prove not only the action of faith in those too-much depreciated times, but also the power of human genius in the service of that faith. An exiled Pope, an Order without any material resources, founded on the most absolute poverty, a town often ravaged by armies on the march, a people a prey to persecuting schismatics—such on this occasion were the treasurers of Providence!

In the spring of 1250 the Minister-General wrote to all the Friars Minors and Christian sovereigns, announcing that the translation of the body of S. Francis from the church of S. George to the new basilica would take place on the 25th of May of the same year, the Feast of Pentecost, when he would open the Chapter-General. The reputation of "the Seraph of Assisi" was so universal that the Catholic sovereigns hastened to send rich offerings for the decoration of the new church, the Pope's being the most noteworthy. Precluded from taking part in this solemnity, either on account of his great age (he was almost a centenarian) or the gravity of political events, he deputed three legates to deposit on the saint's tomb a golden cross enriched with precious stones and containing a portion of the true Cross, sacred vessels in gold and silver, a golden altar-screen set with jewels and pearls, sacerdotal ornaments of great richness, and a large sum of money for the completion of the edifice; with an accompanying apostolic letter, in which we read: "The Lord, who multiplies His mercies to renew the youth of the Church, His only Spouse, is pleased to glorify in this world by miracles the relics of those whom He has crowned on high. Wherefore, in the midst of the innumerable cares and difficulties that overwhelm Us, We

find an inexhaustible subject of consolation and thanksgiving in the glory He sheds upon Francis, our Father and yours, and perhaps more ours than yours. We are glad to learn that to so many other miracles previously wrought, We may add the raising to life a dead man in Germany, and more than ever rejoice to publish the praises of so great a saint. In return We have this sweet confidence that, having loved us so much during his mortal life, he loves us still more and continually intercedes for us, now that he sees face to face Him who is Love. We receive with favour your pious desire to transfer his remains to the church that will be dedicated to him." At the conclusion of this letter, he granted indulgences for the solemnity of the translation of the relics,* and nominated as apostolic commissaries for the occasion the Minister-General (Friar Elias) and some other religious of the same Order. It will be seen by this brief that if the Franciscan family was entirely devoted to the Holy See, the latter, in return, showered favours upon it and shielded it with its high protection.

The ceremony of translation—one had said the translation of a living man, so flexible were the limbs and so fresh the sacred stigmata—began early on the morning of Saturday the 24th of May, the eve of Pentecost, when the body was removed from its temporary tomb and placed upon a funeral-car drawn by oxen covered with rich scarlet palls, the gift of the Greek Emperor, and surrounded by three legates of the Holy See, Friar Elias and the other apostolic commissaries. Then came, in two interminable files, bishops, clerics,

* The translation of S. Francis is celebrated on May 25. Popes Alexander IV. and Martin V. have granted fifty days' indulgence to all those who visit a church of the Order during the feast.

[illegible] religious, and the magistrates [illegible] the people being massed at [illegible] of the number of pilgrims, [illegible] they were obliged to encamp [illegible] of the town. During [illegible] they sang hymns com- [illegible] in honour of the Seraphic [illegible] miracles* on the way heightened [illegible]

[illegible] never witnessed such splendours. [illegible] overshadowed them. The [illegible] Paradiso in good [illegible] the inhabitants of Assisi, per- [illegible] in the crowd, and doubtless fearing [illegible] of their treasure, rushed [illegible] upon the coffin, [illegible] the church, banging the doors, and then [illegible] at a great depth behind an [illegible] in the centre of a vault, hollowed [illegible] and known to them alone.† In con- [illegible] proceeding the apostolic [illegible] could not fulfil their office nor affix their [illegible] and so the fête, begun under the [illegible] ended in a kind of profanation. This [illegible] grieved the holy Pontiff, Gregory IX., [illegible] at the conduct of the people of [illegible] whom he sternly rebuked for having, like the [illegible] dared to touch with profane hands those [illegible] and deprived the saint of the honour due

* S. Bonaventure.

† The *Palmier Seraphique* (Lives of the Franciscan Saints) [illegible] under date May 25, feast of the translation of S. Francis, that the citizens of Assisi took up arms, and that the body was [illegible] in the new church when the mayor and his [illegible] seized upon it.—*Translator.*

to him, charged the bishops of Perugia and Spoleto to reproach them with their ingratitude and, if they did not make ample reparation for their fault within fifteen days, to issue a sentence of interdict and excommunication against them. The old city which, after all, had only sinned through excessive piety, with a view of ensuring permanent possession of so great a treasure, was not hardened in guilt; they immediately sent delegates to Rome to make the *amende honorable*, and everything was forgiven.

This incident had the most deplorable consequences. For nearly six hundred years they did not know the precise spot where the relics of the holy Patriarch reposed.* The popular imagination amused itself by

* The historical record of the translation makes no mention of the place where the saint's body was deposited, although there are numerous narratives of the ceremonial. The first writer who speaks of it is Cardinal Albornos, Archbishop of Toledo, who in 1355 obtained the Pope's permission to view his venerated body, and, it is said, found it intact. "Even if the Church had no other proofs of its divinity," he exclaimed, "S. Francis alone would suffice to confirm the faith!" Pope Nicholas V., as Wadding relates, being at Assisi in 1446, taking with him Cardinal Astorgius, Archbishop of Benevento his secretary, and a French bishop, repaired to the subterranean church at night. Descending a marble staircase of seventeen steps, they made their way through a long passage to an iron door fastened with three different padlocks, which their conductor opened. The Pope first entered alone, and was so moved that they could hear him weeping outside. Then he called in his companions, who were seized with a holy dread on seeing the body of S. Francis erect upon a marble pedestal, barefooted, his face turned to the west, his eyes raised to heaven, and his hands crossed in the sleeves of his habit. Alongside him, likewise erect, was another corpse clothed in the Dominican habit, with clasped hands like a man in a prayer, his eyes fixed on the Seraphic Patriarch's feet. This crypt, it was said, had three vaults, the body of S. Francis being in the centre. Alongside were the remains of three of his companions, the Venerable Angelo and Leo; the third was unknown. The Pope continually shed

evolving very pretty legends about the attitude and qualities of the stigmatised body; but historical certitude was wanting. It is only in the nineteenth

tears and respectfully kissed his feet, hands, and face. The prelates who accompanied him were content to embrace the wounds in the feet. A heavenly odour was diffused all around, and the pious visitors were never tired of wondering and praying; but after passing five hours in the crypt, to their great regret they had to come away at daybreak. Some time after Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan, had the same happiness by permission of Pope Nicholas V., and in 1457, at the Chapter-General of the Order, declared before the assembled Fathers that it was to this favour he owed his great love for the Friars Minors. A rich inhabitant of Assisi, who had enjoyed along with him the privilege of venerating these precious relics, copied the following epitaph, alleged to have been composed by Gregory IX. at the time of the canonisation:—

V. S. C. A.
Francisci Romani
Celsa humilitate conspicui,
Christiani orbis fulcimenti,
Ecclesiæ reparatoris,
Corpori nec viventi nec mortuo
Christi crucifixi plagarum
Clavorumque insignibus admirando
Papa novæ fœturæ collacrymans
Lætificans et exultans
Jussu, manu, munificentia posuit
Anno Domini. M. CC. XXVIII.
XVI. Kalendas Augusti
Ante obitum mortuus, post obitum
vivus.

The four capital letters are interpreted by Wadding to mean, Viro Seraphico, Catholico, Apostolico; and that S. Francis is called "Roman" on account of his great attachment to the faith of the Roman Church and to the Roman Pontiffs, or because Assisi was in the Papal states. Sixtus V., formerly General of the Order, had resolved to expose the body to public veneration; but S. James de la Marche, whom he consulted, replied that the moment was not yet come, and that God wished to keep this precious treasure still concealed in order to reveal it when it would be useful to the Church. This Pope, having gone to Assisi

century the veil that shrouded the mystery has been drawn aside. In 1818 Pius VII. authorised Father Joseph de Bonis, Minister-General of the Friars Minors Conventuals, to make excavations in the rocky flanks of the mountain under the high altar of the lower church, in consequence of indications given by a certain personage who confidently affirmed that he had descended into the subterranean crypt. They first came across a very narrow hole, the bottom of which was filled up with a cement so hard that it could only be removed with great difficulty. Digging deeper, they encountered two walls, which led to the discovery of two slabs placed one over the other, and which seemed to have been put there designedly. These stones having been broken, they found a third, the position of which indicated that it covered an empty space. They pierced through this with great precautions and discerned

in 1476 to gain the Portiuncula indulgence, caused the vault to be opened, and, along with John Arcimbold, Archbishop of Milan, and the captain of his Guards, visited the body and cut off a few locks of S. Francis's hair, which he carefully preserved. On November 18, 1509, they are said to have been viewed by Galeotta di Bistochio, and during the July of 1650 by two cardinals, the General of the Conventuals and his assistant, and two Capuchins, by permission of Innocent X. It is right to add that under Clement XI., Octavio, a Friar Minor and Bishop of Assisi, contested the fact and combated the proofs, sustaining that the body was under the high altar of the lower church, and that there was no subterranean crypt. This led to such a warm discussion that the Pope forbade the question being further agitated. Pope S. Pius V. subsequently instituted an unsuccessful search, and Paul V. put his interdict on any further investigations, an interdict practically annulled by Pius VII., as related above. See *Palmier Séraphique*, t. v. p. 532 *et seq.* (date May 25), and *Chalippe*, t. iii. liv. vi. p. 19 *et seq.* The compiler of the former (Mgr. Guérin, editor of the *Petits Bollandistes*) quotes Wadding at some length, and the latter, author of the fullest and most esteemed life of the saint, devotes several pages to the subject.—*Translator.*

through an opening an iron grating which, by the aid of a light, they saw contained a human skeleton lying in a disproportionately large unhewn stone coffin intact, the arms crossed upon the breast, and a stone, the saint's usual pillow, placed under the head; while alongside lay remnants of a coarse habit, twenty-eight little balls, apparently rosary beads (twelve made of amber and sixteen of ebony), a silver ring set with an antique coral, eight coins of the twelfth century, and bits of a cord, the whole being submitted to the examination of physicians, surgeons, and professors of chemistry deputed by the juridical commission composed of the bishops of Assisi, Nocera, Spoleto, Perugia, and Foligno, and who gave their opinion on the crystallisation with which several of the bones were covered, judging the skeleton to be that of a man of middle age and low stature. The religious who superintended the excavations, which occupied fifty-two nights of patient toil, ending on the night of the 12th of December 1818, when all present were conscious of a most delightful odour issuing from beneath the grating, had no doubt that it was what remained of the body of S. Francis. There was no epitaph. But what need was there of one? Was not the basilica called "S. Francis's Sepulchre"? Was not the name of the Seraphic Father written on all the walls? So, having taken every means that prudence suggested to get at the truth, the five bishops addressed their verbal process to the Pope, who named a fresh commission composed of cardinals and other grave personages to examine the procedure and, on their reporting favourably, and after a minute investigation of the matter himself, issued a brief, dated September 5, 1822, solemnly declaring that the body found under the high

altar of the basilica of S. Francis of Assisi was that of the holy Patriarch; adding, "The discovery of this precious body will be for Us a new and singular gage of the special protection of this great saint in times so difficult."

While the Church was proceeding in this important affair with its wonted wisdom and caution, the Lord manifested by striking prodigies the authenticity of these relics. A Dominican nun, Suóra Maria Luigia, who was afflicted with a tumour on the left knee, from which she suffered greatly and for the cure of which she had employed no remedy, was, in the month of January 1819, suddenly delivered from this infirmity by the application of a piece of linen that had touched S. Francis's tomb; a fact verified by herself and four companions interrogated juridically by order of the Bishop of Foligno. Giuseppe Natalini, a muleteer living in Assisi, who had been four years tormented by a very acute rheumatism, was carried into the church of S. Francis the moment the bishops were sealing the iron grating enclosing the saint's remains. Natalini stretched himself upon the stone that had covered the coffin, confidently invoking the succour of S. Francis: that very instant all his pains left him, he rose perfectly cured and returned home. His deposition, made before the Bishop of Assisi on the 5th of July following, was confirmed by that of his physician and two other witnesses.*

His Holiness directed that the precious deposit should be preserved intact in the place where it was

* These facts and the detailed description of the discovery of the body, given in a memorandum presented to Pius VII. by Friar Bonis, are taken from the Appendix to the Life of S. Francis in the *Petits Bollandistes*, under date October 4.—*Translator.*

found, and a monument raised to the glory of S. Francis. A marble mausoleum now covers the vault where the body of the servant of God still reposes in his old coffin. A few relics only were removed by order of the same Pontiff and sent to Francis II., Emperor of Austria, who caused them to be exposed to public veneration.

But the filial piety of the Franciscans towards their holy founder, and the respect of the people of Assisi for the memory of the illustrious dead, were not satisfied with a simple monument. Four years after, in the first year of the pontificate of Leo XII.—the same who by a decree dated June 22, 1824, directed that in future the whole Order of S. Francis should on the 12th of December celebrate with the rite double major the feast of the invention of the body of its holy founder —they surrounded the vault with a church built in the form of a Greek cross, symbolical of the mysterious figure Tau impressed upon the brow of Francis, a glorious sanctuary to which has been given the name of "the church of the sepulchre." There, surmounted by a dome, enriched with varied coloured marbles and decorations in gilt bronze, in a metal urn, in the same place and under the same grating where they lay concealed for six hundred years—while in his Order, particularly in the convent of Assisi, it was long traditionally believed that the saint's body, whole and intact, stood erect with eyes open, its sacred wounds fresh and ruddy, awaiting the summons of the Archangel's trumpet resounding through space to arise in incorruption with the glorified bodies of the saints, like the embalmed corpse of Charlemagne sitting erect on his curule chair, with Gospel book open on his lap, under the vaulted roof of his own cathedral—repose

those relics so long veiled from the gaze and veneration of Christians.* Over the shrine and resting against the column supporting the edifice rises an altar; ten bas-reliefs in terra-cotta decorate the walls; a large ventilator, reaching up to the ground overhead, lets in sufficient light; while in the hemicycle between the crypt and garden two beautiful white marble statues of Pius VII. and Pius IX.† greet the pilgrim's admiring gaze. In those two august sentinels the Papacy is there, guarding the monument it has raised.

Thanks to pontifical zeal and the piety of the inhabitants of Assisi, the body of the stigmatisé of Alverno is preserved in all its integrity and without any mutilation.‡ As to the other relics, of which there are a large number, the principal are:—At the Sacro Convento, two of his tunics, one sheet of parchment stained with the blood that flowed from the wound in his side, two pairs of sandals, one of chamois leather, the other of felt made by S. Clare, a camel-hair shirt, an ivory horn given him by the Sultan and which he

* Wadding, the celebrated Irish Franciscan and principal historian of the Order, speaks of it as "a constant tradition," and Friar Bonis, the Minister-General of the Conventuals, as "a tradition rather widely spread among the Franciscans, but not resting upon any solid foundation." The discovery in 1818 would seem to relegate it among exploded traditions. The Capuchins printed in 1698 an abridged account of all that had hitherto appeared touching alleged previous discoveries—*Translator.*

† Bartholomew of Pisa, who died in 1401, asserts in his *Book of the Conformities*, that his heart reposes in a little chapel in the church of Portiuncula, but Wadding affirms the contrary, on the authority of a constant tradition in the town of Assisi. Fra Bartolomeo's assertion is attributed to S. Francis having said that his heart would rest in that church, not to be taken literally, but as expressing the affection he had for the place where he laid the foundation of his Order—*Translator.*

‡ The bas-reliefs and statues are a gift of Pius IX.

used to assemble the people, and the autograph of the benediction given to Friar Leo; at S. Clare's, the miraculous picture of S. Damiens, a panel painting in the Byzantine style; at San Francesco-a-Ripa, one of the saint's cords; at Florence, the robe the saint gave the Conte di Montaigu, at the Capuchin Convent in Paris, one of his grey woollen cloaks; in fine, the different objects found in the tomb of S. Clare, hidden, too, for six centuries and discovered thirty years after that of the Seraphic Father (1850). The letter the Abbess of the Clarisses of Assisi wrote to the Clarisses of Marseilles to apprise them of this discovery is too valuable and trustworthy a document not to be registered in this history. Here it is in all its touching simplicity:—

"My dearest sisters, you are not without having heard of the happiness we have of possessing several relics of our holy founder. We were longing—God knows with what ardour!—for the day when it would be permitted to us to venerate them nearer, when at length Mgr. Luigi Landi* fixed the opening of our Mother's tomb on the day of the Stigmata of S. Francis. He did better still: he was pleased to preside on the occasion himself. Then we unfolded on a table, with all the respect you may imagine, the robe, mantle, hair shirt, and tunic of our Mother, and then the relics of our holy founder; and for five hours we feasted our eyes and hearts on the moving sight of those precious liveries, of poverty, penitence, and contempt of the world. How we covered with kisses our Father's coarse tunic! How we devoured with our eyes the white leather sandals our holy Mother made for him to protect his feet when walking from the acute pain of the stigmata! With what respect we

* Bishop of Assisi.

gathered up the lint that must have imbibed his blood! Here, it is the coarse white woollen mantle with which the Bishop of Assisi covered the shoulders of the holy Patriarch when the latter, renouncing his inheritance, quitted even his garments so as to have nothing in common with the world; it is indeed that servant's mantle of which the historians speak. There, it is the alb our Father used on the days he filled the functions of deacon, another piece of work of our Mother! Oh, if you saw how finely it is worked! How clever the saint was at this kind of embroidery! Oh, my dearest sisters, what an eloquent teaching this exposition of relics was for us!"

Holy and immortal relics of the two seraphs of Assisi, remain for ever in the doubly-sacred monasteries that possess thee! S. Francis, patriarch of the poor, stretch out thy hand over that city thy dying lips have blessed! S. Clare, princess of the poor, deliver thy country from the modern vandals who want to rob it of its faith!

Let us now glance at the cultus of S. Francis and the truly extraordinary splendours that adorn his tomb. Distinguished by numberless miracles, it became the resort of princes and peoples, of sovereign pontiffs and the simple faithful, from S. Louis to Francis I. of Austria, from Gregory IX. to Pius IX. During the long lapse of the Middle Ages, Assisi rivalled Jerusalem; and we may affirm, without fear of denial, that if the sepulchre of Christ was and ever remains the first of pilgrimages, that of His servant Francis was the second.

It must not be thought the cultus of our saint was restricted to Umbria or confined to cloister interiors. It soon spread to every clime, even the most distant

islands; and after the discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus, reigned in both hemispheres. Nevertheless, France and Spain,* those two nations he loved with a love of predilection and which had heard his voice and the beatings of his apostolic heart, were distinguished among all others and rivalled Italy in their zeal to pay him homage and celebrate his virtues. Kings and barons of high lineage gave his name to their sons; the people raised altars to him; all the disinherited of the world implored the succour of his powerful mediation; and God was pleased to justify

* In 1343 a nobleman named Diaz, of Ciudad in Spain, was leading a very disorderly life, but was always very liberal to the Franciscans. He fell ill, and during his illness one of his servants had a vision in which the Seraphic Patriarch ordered him to get his master to go to confession; but the latter scoffed at the proposition. His valet had another dream, in which he saw the demon trying to drag his master's soul down to hell, while S. Francis reiterated the order he had given him. The servant replied that he had despised his advice and asked for a sign to convince his master. The saint directed him to put his finger into a boiler of boiling pitch, and he drew it out quite burned. This prodigy made the nobleman decide upon confessing, and shortly after he died. On the fourth day, when they were carrying his corpse to the church for interment, followed by a numerous assemblage of mourners, the dead man suddenly started up and called for silence. "All you who have come to pay me this last tribute of respect," he said, "be not affrighted, and listen to me attentively. I was dead, and I have come to life again; my soul, on appearing before the Sovereign Judge, was condemned to the flames of hell, because, in my last confession which I made through fear of death, I had no repentance for the sins I had committed; but S. Francis, whom I have always honoured with a special devotion, had compassion on my lot, and obtained that my soul should return to its body for twenty days, in order that I may do penance for my sins; afterwards I shall die again." Saying these words he rose, distributed his goods to the poor, and practised such austerities that no one doubted his salvation. They engraved on his tomb these words, "Here lies Peter Diaz, who was restored to life by S. Francis."—*Palmier Séraphique.*

their confidence by abundant benefits of every kind, as may be read in the chronicles of the Order. The holy Patriarch gave such an elevated tone to the thought of his epoch, awakened such profound enthusiasm, exercised such a sway over contemporary society, that he merited to share with the two most illustrious personages of his time the honour of giving his name to his age. We speak indifferently of the age of Innocent III. and the age of S. Dominic and S. Francis.

Still, whatever may be the devotion of the various countries in the world to this lover of poverty, there is one city that takes precedence of all others, one city where his memory is as fresh as if he died yesterday, one city that is so identified with him as to participate in his greatness and be called the "Seraphic City." Our readers have long known it: it is Assisi, his native place. Let us explore it in the spirit of faith; for, very different from French towns which daily change their aspect and their masters, it has preserved its mediæval physiognomy. There, the gambols of children are less noisy than elsewhere; the steep, silent streets are still adorned with antique frescoes recalling some scene in the life of S. Francis or S. Clare; the gothic houses, the workmanship of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, have grated windows like convents; and the women, who ply the distaff at their doorsteps without raising their eyes, are like nuns. Besides, most of them are daughters of S. Francis, and form part of the Third Order of Penance. There, everything speaks of Francis,* and Francis speaks of God. But the monument *par excellence* is the saint's tomb, a real

* A portion of the walls of his father's house, where his early life was passed, are yet standing, and near them may still be seen the door of the stable in which he was born. In the church of San Giorgio, where he was buried and canonised, there still stands

marvel of architectural magnificence, which from the beginning was the sanctuary of literature and art, and of which a modern writer has said, "There is nothing like it; before seeing it one has no idea of the art and genius of the Middle Ages. Add to it Dante and the *Fioretti* of S. Francis, and it is the masterpiece of mystical Christianity." *

We have seen how Gregory IX. had deigned to lay the first stone, and at the cost of what efforts of genius the Minister-General had, so to speak, caused it to spring out of the rocky entrails of the Colle del Paradiso. The works were not entirely completed until the expiration of thirteen years (1243); and it was another successor of Peter, Pope Innocent IV., who came in person to consecrate the basilica with the adjoining monastery. From that day forward the monastery was called the Sacro Convento, the sacred convent *par excellence*, and the church received the title of the Papal Chapel.†

The basilica is composed of three sanctuaries, one over the other: the upper church,‡ the lower church, and the crypt.§ The two first are the work of Giacómo

the font in which he was baptized, and the cathedral in which he was confirmed is near at hand. It was in the *aula massima* of the present episcopal palace he divested himself of all he possessed, even his clothes, to enter upon a life of the strictest evangelical poverty. In a small street in the middle of the town the door of the house of Messer Bernardo di Quintavalle is still shown; it was here S. Francis passed that night of ecstasy which drew his first companion to his side.

* Taine, *Voyage en Italie.*

† It is one of the Pope's patriarchal basilicas.

‡ Called the Church of the Twelve Apostles, from a picture of Our Lady and the Twelve Apostles.

§ The sacristy of the subterranean church or crypt contains many relics in costly cases, including a large veil of the Blessed Virgin brought from Palestine, pieces of the true Cross, crown of

Germano; the latter is the work of an architect of French origin, Valadier. The style of the three sanctuaries presents a striking contrast to the eye, but the profound meaning of which is readily seized: they image forth the three phases of the saint's life. The base is cruciform. The grave, severe Roman style of the lower church, recalls the penitence and austerities of the son of Bernardone. The upper church, flooded with light, with its slender pointed arches, its round, foliated windows, its elaborately sculptured stalls, and its marvellous embellishment of elegant forms twining round it like a bridal attire, gives you a glimpse of the saint glorious and crowned in heaven. The first shows him to you with tearful eyes; the second inspires you with that plaintive hope which is the most fruitful element of prayer; the third, symbol of ecstasy and transfiguration, gives you a foretaste of eternal felicity. The whole harmonises in a truly admirable *ensemble*, telling in a stone-poem of the hopes, the struggles, and the definitive victory of the Seraph of Assisi.

Twelve convents of men and women, occupied by different branches of the Order, are pitched like so many tents under the shadow of the patriarchal pavilion where the Seraphic Father reposes. To avoid repetition, we will here only mention such monuments as have not yet been referred to in the course of this

thorns, &c., besides writings of S. Francis, S. Bonaventure, S. Charles Borromeo, and others. In the sacristy of the church of the Poor Clares is shown the large crucifix from the mouth of which the miraculous Voice addressed S. Francis. The church, enclosing the Portiuncula chapel, which belongs to the Recollects—who also have possession of the ruins of the saint's house and the prison or den in which he often did penance, which is too small for a person either to stand up or lie down in without stooping very low—contains the pulpit from which S. Anthony of Padua preached, and many relics of S. Francis.

history. All the places Francis sanctified by his presence have been preserved whole and entire,* or transformed into oratories, ranged round the sepulchral church like so many children round their mother. Our Lady of Angels, with its dome glistening like a luminous pharos in the midst of the plain; S. Clare's, a handsome gothic church of the thirteenth century, due to the genius of the Friar Minor, Filippo di Campobello of Spoleto; the Chiesa Nuova, a Greek church surmounted by five cupolas in memory of the five stigmata of S. Francis, and built by Philip II., King of Spain, on the site of the dwelling of the Moriconi; in fine, above the overhanging ruins of the feudal castle, the modest chapel of the Capuchin Fathers—such are the monuments that serve as an avenue to lead you to the tomb of the holy Patriarch.

The humble Francis when dying only asked for a little earth, and even that same in dishonoured ground; and, lo! a triple basilica covers his bones and a whole city becomes his mausoleum. The infamous gibbets are replaced by masterpieces of art, † the executioner by the minister of divine pardon, and the lugubrious wailings of criminals by the most delightful melodies.

* The cell in which he died is preserved at Portiuncula. A few paces distant are the remains of the thorn bush which blossomed roses, and in the plain the caves of Rivo Torto where he and his twelve companions led lives of heroic penance. In the Convent behind S. Damiens, which he and S. Clare founded, there is the same hill, the same wainscot in the choir, the same tables and rough benches in the humble refectory, the alabaster tabernacle and ivory ciborium which S. Clare placed before the convent door and before which she prayed, while a troop of pirates who had scaled the wall fled in confusion, seized with a supernatural dread.

† Among those masterpieces let us cite in passing the tomb of a princess of France, Hecuba of Lusignan, Queen of Cyprus, who died in 1243, and that of a princess of Savoy, Maria, daughter of Charles Emmanuel I., who died in 1661.

"But the men of the Middle Ages did not think they had completed a monument when they had placed one stone upon another. It was necessary that those stones should speak, that they should speak the language of painting, which is understood by the lowly and ignorant; that heaven should be rendered visible, and the presence of saints and angels imaged forth to console and preach to the people." * Painting, then, came forward in its turn. The vaulted roofs of both the upper churches were covered with an azure expanse studded with golden stars, and on the walls were unfolded episodes in the life of the Penitent of Assisi on one side and biblical revelations on the other; but, as if it were impossible to touch with impunity those blessed walls, the basilica became the cradle of a new school, and art soared from that hill to wing its flight from the Alps to the Bay of Naples. After Giunta of Pisa and Giovanni Cimabue of Florence, after those representatives of the old Byzantine school, came Giotto—Giotto, the little shepherd-pupil of Cimabue, and who surpassed his master; Giotto, who accomplished in painting what Giacómo Germano † had done for architecture, a real revolution, introducing a purer, more ideal, more Christian type into the arts.‡

In the immortal frescoes of the upper church Giotto

* Ozanam.

† Jacques l'Allemand—literally, James the German.

‡ There is a fine picture of Giotto's in the Louvre (209) representing the stigmatisation of S. Francis on a golden ground. It was painted for the church of S. Francis at Pisa, where it was hung upon a pillar near the high altar, and held in great veneration by the Pisans. The saint, just after receiving the stigmata in his hands, feet, and side, is on his knees, gazing with rapture on the already vanishing vision. At the base of the picture are depicted three other episodes in the saint's life, viz., the vision of Pope Innocent III.; the founder and his twelve companions receiving the habit and statutes of his Order from the same pontiff; and S. Francis preaching to the birds. The Louvre is rich in Fran-

drew with a bold hand the most magnificent panegyric of the saint, his conformity with Jesus Christ. There is nothing more charming than the frescoes he subsequently executed in the roof of the lower church, representing the virtues and triumph of Francis and

ciscan subjects. The stigmatisation is also depicted by Francesco Pesello (290), a Florentine artist, who successfully imitated Fra Lippi, and by an unknown artist of the school of Vannuci (448). We have S. Francis in ecstasy or contemplation by Francesco Albani (8), Lodovico Cardi (121), after Lodovoco Carracci (129), Filippo Lauri (231), and Guido (333). Filippo Lauri (Roman school) depicts him lulled to sleep in his illness by strains of heavenly music, and Guido in ecstatic prayer kneeling in a grotto before a crucifix and a death's head. The latter was long in the possession of the Savelli in Rome, from whom it passed into the collection of Prince Pamphili, who gave it to Louis XIV. Some think it was meant for S. Francis of Paula, founder of the Minims, and, in a certain sense, continuator of the work of S. Francis of Assisi, who predicted his advent a century beforehand. It is related that one day, having proposed the quadragesimal fast to his disciples, by whom it was rejected as too much for human weakness, seized with a sudden prophetic inspiration, he said, "You do not wish to lead the lenten life, brethren? Well, know that after me there will come another Francis, who will found a new Order, and by a solemn vow establish this abstinence which you regard as an intolerable yoke" (*Hist. de S. François de Paule, par Mgr. Dabert*, p. 32). The Louvre also contains "S. Francis and S. Benedict" (54), by Guercino; "S. Francis and Pope Sixtus IV." (259), by Massone, on an altar-screen painted for the sepulchral chapel at Savone erected by Sixtus IV. to contain the ashes of his family; "The Virgin and Infant Jesus adored by S. John the Baptist, S. Francis, and S. Catherine" (317), by Procaccini, in the style of Corregio; and "S. Jerome and S. Francis," by an unknown artist of the fifteenth century. He is also pictorially represented by a variety of artists receiving the child Jesus from the Blessed Virgin; receiving a cross from the infant Saviour; holding the Babe of Bethlehem in his arms; distributing the cord to various persons; upborne by clouds; preaching to his Friars; giving his hand to a wolf who is putting out his paw, recalling the episode of the wolf of Gubbio; holding two branches of flowers; on his knees meditating; and dying in his cell, surrounded by religious. The most ancient known portrait of the saint is in the treasury of the basilica at Assisi. They have a cast of his face taken after death at Portiuncula.—Translator.

disposed in the form of a crown over his tomb. It fills one with admiration to see with what strong Christian sentiment the artist conceived his design, and with what genius he executed it. For him, the religious virtues are the basis and cause of the crowning of Francis, and the pencil should represent them boldly in an aspect the most startling to human weakness, that is to say, under the three monastic vows, Chastity, Obedience, and Poverty. Chastity, in the form of a woman covered with a long chastely folded veil, has retired into a fortress, praying with clasped hands; while Penitence, armed with a discipline, is driving out Death and illicit Love. Obedience, clad in a humble sack, receives the Rule and the yoke imposed on Pride as on a furious animal. Finally, Poverty, with a face furrowed by fasting, dishevelled locks, and loins girt with a coarse cord, but with a noble brow and perfect beauty, Poverty, the widow of Christ, extends her hand to Francis. A dog, that enemy of beggars, is barking at her, while two young voluptuaries, the one clad in purple and the other in blue, are throwing stones at her and strewing her path with thorns; but Christ unites the two spouses, and the Eternal appears in the midst of the clouds, as if it was not too much for heaven and earth to witness the nuptials of those two mendicants.*

Nor have the disciples and continuators of Giotto been idle. Let us cite only a few of their pictures: the Prophets by Adono Doni, imitated by Raphael at Santa Maria della Pace in Rome; the Crucifixion of Our Lord by Pietro Cavallini, a painter esteemed by Michael Angelo; the Life of the Blessed Virgin by Taddeo Gaddi; the History of S. Mary Magdalen by Buffalmacco; and the Legend of S. Martin of Tours by

* Ozanam.

Simeone Memmi. Giottino's paintings have disappeared. When one pauses before the image of Jesus crucified, with the sad-visaged, weeping angels around the cross, or collecting in golden cups the Saviour's blood, his heart should be very hardened who would not, kneeling, weep and smite his breast. In our age, Overbeck has come to offer in turn at Assisi the tribute of his genius, but it is in Our Lady of Angels he has placed it.

Such was the salutary influence of Francis, not only on the morals of his own and succeeding ages, but also on the arts.* He imported into art a sentiment that until then had only existed in a crude state—seraphic love. He breathed his inspiration into a whole school, the Umbrian school, and raised up a generation of artists who laid at his feet the homage of their pencils in the hope that his undying glory would be reflected in their works.

In fine, Poetry, which equalled and perhaps surpassed the sister arts, Architecture and Painting, came with its touching tribute: S. Bonaventure, Dante, Tasso,

* "More than one Franciscan had already acquired distinction as a painter; but the influence of S. Francis over lay artists was henceforward immense; they seemed to have discovered the whole secret of their inspiration in the prodigious development he had given to the element of love; they placed his life and that of S. Clare alongside that of Christ and His Mother in their choice of subjects; and all the celebrated painters of that and the succeeding century came to pay their tribute to them, adorning the basilica of Assisi with their paintings. Moreover, it was nigh thereto was to arise the mystical school of Umbria, which, in Perugino and Raphael before his fall, attained the ultimate reach of the perfection of Christian art. One had said that God, with a marvellous and harmonious fitness, was pleased to place the crown of art, the fairest adornment in the world, on that spot of earth whence arose to heaven the most fervent prayers and the noblest sacrifices."—Montalembert, *Hist. de S. Elizabeth de Hongrie.* Introduction, pp. 103, 104.

Jacopone di Todi, Lope di Viega, Anatole de Ségur—what poets, and what a copious flood of eulogy they pour forth when they sing of the Seraph of Assisi! Take the famous passage from Dante alone:—

> "Intra Tupino e l'acque, che discende
> Del colle eletto dal beato Ubaldo,
> Fertile costa d'alto monte pende,
> Onde Perugia sente freddo e caldo
> Da Porta Sole, e dirietro le piange
> Per greve giogo Nocera con Gualdo.
> Di quella costa là, dov'ella frange
> Più sua rattezza, nacque al mondo un Sole,
> Come fa questo tal volta di Gange.
> Però chi d'esso loco fa parole,
> Non dica Ascesi, che direbbe corto,
> Ma Oriente, se proprio dir vuole." *

And if we are asked why the name of the son of Bernardone has become so popular, why Christian nations have vied in exalting him, why generations have handed down from age to age the ravishing canticles of Jacopone, the inspired pages of Dante, S. Bonaventure, and S. Teresa, the paintings of Cimabue and Giotto, we answer: "It is because God is pleased to exalt those who humble themselves, and that people hail in Francis of Assisi the most finished type of self-renunciation and compassion for the sufferings of others!"

> * "Between Tupino, and the wave, that falls
> From blest Ubaldo's chosen hill, there hangs
> Rich slope of mountain high, whence heat and cold
> Are wafted through Perugia's eastern gate:
> And Nocera with Gualdo, in its rear,
> Mourn for their heavy yoke. Upon that side,
> Where it doth break its steepness most, arose
> A sun upon the world, as duly this
> From Ganges doth: therefore let none, who speak
> Of that place, say Ascesi; for its name
> Were lamely so deliver'd; but the East,
> To call things rightly, be it henceforth styl'd."
>
> *Del Paradiso*, canto xi. Carey's translation.

CHAPTER XX

GLANCE AT THE STATE OF THE ORDER: 1. AT THE MOMENT OF THE DEATH OF S. FRANCIS; 2. AT THE EPOCH OF THE GREAT REVOLUTION; 3. AT THE PRESENT TIME.

IT is the privilege of the founders of religious Orders, still more than other saints, that their providential mission as well as their glory is prolonged beyond the tomb, that it is invested with a splendour growing more and more lustrous with the lapse of ages, their teaching and example never ceasing to raise up faithful imitators in the Church. One may say of each of them what the Apostle said of the patriarch Abel, "he being dead yet speaketh."* Their life is a perpetual preaching, ever fruitful of good, as that of the impious of sinister renown is a perpetual preaching ever fruitful of evil. It is this that constitutes the incomparable glory of the Patriarch of Assisi; he survives in his sons who, inspired with the same spirit, continue his work throughout the ages, assailing the errors of their time and bringing new generations into subjection to Christ. It would, if it were possible, be a captivating study to enter into here, to seek in history the approximate number of souls Francis has rescued by main force from hell and the demon to give them to God and Paradise. It would then be seen that a single man has furnished the Church militant with thousands of apostles, martyrs, and virgins, overspread the world with an innumerable multitude of fervent tertiaries, and peopled heaven with hundreds of canonised or

* Heb. xi. 4.

beatified saints; and at such a sight could one refrain from exclaiming with the Prophet-King, "God is wonderful in His saints"?

In the impossibility of getting at statistics of this kind we will content ourselves, in concluding the life and labours of the Seraph of Assisi, by casting a rapid glance at the general state of the Order: 1, at the moment of his death; 2, at the epoch of the great Revolution; and, 3, at the present time.

We will direct our attention chiefly to France and the first Order. Besides, it is known that the Order of Poor Ladies has generally had fewer subjects than that of the Friars Minors—which will surprise no one, considering their austere life—and that the Third Order has always had three or four times as many as the two others put together.

1. In the thirteenth century the Franciscans were the most ardent propagators of the Catholic Faith, extending the frontiers of the Empire of Christ even to the heart of the East. At the time of the Seraphic Father's death, that is to say, less than twenty years after the creation of their institute, they had convents or stations in every quarter of the world—in Asia, at Jerusalem, whence they extended their ramifications all over Palestine, and speedily set out to evangelise Persia, India, China, and Tartary;* in Africa, at

* In 1307 Clement V. nominated a Friar Minor, John of Montcorvin, Archbishop of Pekin, and gave him as suffragans seven bishops selected from the same Order. Hunted by the barbarian hords of Tamerlane (1406), the Franciscans returned as soon as they could to the Celestial Empire to resume the work of their predecessors. It was a Franciscan bishop of Goa who gave hospitality to the Apostle of the Indies, S. Francis Xavier. A little later (1580) the celebrated Father Matthew Ricci, of the Company of Jesus, used his influence with the Emperor of China to have three Friars Minors, who were languishing in prison, restored to liberty.

Morocco, and then at Fez and Tunis. In Europe most of the great cities had houses of the Seraphic Order. Let us cite only the principal: In Italy, Rome, Venice, Naples, and Florence, without counting a hundred other cities of minor importance; in Spain, Madrid, Barcelona, Toledo, and Lerida; in Portugal, Coimbra and Lisbon; in the Sardinian States, Turin; in Belgium, Brussels and Louvain; in Bohemia, Prague; in Great Britain and Ireland, Oxford * and Kilkenny,† where

* The Franciscans, known as Grey Friars, came to England in 1224, when a party of English, French, and Italian Fathers landed at Dover. They were lodged in a wooden house in Stinking Lane, Newgate Street, then one of the worst localities in London. They ministered chiefly among the humbler classes, and, dividing their attention between the cure of souls and the cure of bodies, studied medicine and chemistry with such success that down to the fourteenth century the best physicians were admittedly the Franciscans. At the dissolution they had sixty-six convents in England. The learned and illustrious Franciscan, Duns Scotus, the Subtle Doctor, was a Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, and chief professor of divinity in the University, where the Franciscans had acquired considerable influence. Malachy, of the same Order and country as Scotus, flourished about the year 1310. He ranked among the first orators of his age, was a doctor of the University of Oxford, and domestic chaplain to Edward II. The famous Friar Bacon, the founder of experimental philosophy, who joined the Order about 1240, died in 1292 at Oxford, where his lectures had startled the age by their daring novelties.—*Translator.*

† The Franciscan convent of Kilkenny was founded for Conventuals by Richard Mareschal, Earl of Pembroke, A.D. 1234. It was remarkable for its learned men, including the celebrated annalist, John Clynn (1348). The last guardian was Patrick Delany (35th of Henry VIII.) The great chancel of the church still stands. Its halls of philosophy and divinity continued to be frequented for a series of years, while many of the memorable events of the seventeenth century form no inconsiderable feature in the historical records of this once celebrated and beautiful abbey, delightfully situated on the banks of the Nare. The convent of Youghal, the parent establishment of the Order in Ireland, was founded by Maurice Fitzgerald (A.D. 1231), Lord Justice of Ireland 1232, who afterwards retired therein and embraced the institute of S. Francis. He died in 1257, and was

they were placed by Henry III. As to France, here is the alphabetical list of the cities where the Cordeliers —a name given to the Friars Minors, and which was subsequently used to more especially designate the Conventuals and Observantines—were established, with the date of the foundation where it has been accurately ascertained :—

Amiens, thanks to the liberality of the lords of Halvin, Hénancourt, and Lannoy; Angers (1216), by the Dukes of Bretagne and Anjou, whose armorial bearings adorn the conventual church; Arles; Bayeux; Bourges, on account of the celebrated miracle of the mule and the Blessed Eucharist, wrought by S. Anthony of Padua; Brives; Chartres; Le Mans (1220); Lens; Limoges; Mantes-sur-Seine, where S. Bonaventure composed most of his works, and where the stone he used as a pillow was preserved down to the Revolution; Mont-Ferrand; Mirepoix; Montpellier; Paris, where the Blessed Angelo of Pisa was the first guardian (1219); Quimper; Séez; Soissons; Toulouse, where S. Anthony taught theology for some time (1222); Tours, where we find at the head of the benefactors the king, Louis VIII., the Dukes of Vendôme and Amboise, and the Counts de Maillé who

buried there. It conformed to the Strict Observance in 1460. During the terrors of Elizabeth's reign this extensive convent was pillaged and so completely demolished that not a single vestige of its ruins was allowed to remain. Those who escaped fled to the mountains of the County Waterford, where they settled down in a retired but beautiful spot called Curragheen, under the protection of the Dromanagh family. The majority of the convents in Ireland were founded for Conventuals, who subsequently accepted the reform of the Observantines. See Brenan's *Ecclesiastical History of Ireland;* also, *The Rise and Fall of the Irish Franciscan Monasteries*, by the Rev. C. P. Meehan, M.R.I.A.—*Translator.*

subsequently gave the church the Blessed Marie de Maillé; Vienne; and lastly Villefranche, at the gates of Lyons.

We have found in the municipal archives of Le Mans the circumstantial account of the establishment of the Friars Minors in that town. The discovery of this document has gladdened us the more since in our time the monastery of Le Mans has become one of the heads of the Order in France, and the novitiate of the Capuchins of the Province of Paris. We hasten to unfold this treasure to our readers.

About the epoch of the famous Chapter of Mats (1219), Geoffroy de Laval, Dean of the Chapter of the cathedral of Le Mans, wrote to the holy founder begging him to send some of his disciples into the capital of Maine. Francis deputed the venerable Father Electus with four or five companions, who were met on their arrival by Mgr. Maurice and lodged in his palace, while they built them a monastery. Our holy religious led a most edifying life, consecrating the greater part of their days and nights to the exercise of prayer in the cathedral church, and the rest of the time to penitence, preaching, or tending the sick in the hospitals. Such faith and self-devotion could not fail to attract attention. The pious Queen Berangere, widow of Richard Cœur de Lion, appreciating their virtue, gave them a large piece of ground to the east of the town for their habitation (1220). Geoffroy de Laval, having succeeded Mgr. Maurice transferred to Rouen, where his tomb is still to be seen in the choir of S. Julien, consecrated the church of the Cordeliers under the title of the Annunciation of Our Lady, and at his death [illegible], ordered his ashes to be deposited therein. In [illegible] we find Louis IX. S. Louis ratifying the donation

the ground, and in 1331 Philippe de Valois founding a weekly mass in honour of S. Louis, Bishop of Toulouse, his near relation. The monastery of the Cordeliers of Le Mans became one of the most considerable in the kingdom; and from the middle of the thirteenth century down to the invasion of the Huguenots (1362), it contained at least a hundred religious, among whom were men of great worth.*

In 1223 the convent of Le Mans was enabled to send a large number of its community to another town. The venerable Electus took some of his Friars to Vendôme, whither they were invited by Jean de Montoire and his wife, in concert with the Blessed Geoffroy de Loudun, who shortly after occupied the espiscopal see of Le Mans (1234–1258). In 1274, S. Bonaventure held a Chapter-General at Vendôme.

In this narrative we have the history of all the foundations of the epoch. We see the Friars Minors everywhere, coming at the request of the bishop and lords of the soil, and many of whom solicit the honour of being interred in their churches; and so everywhere, honoured by the great and blessed by the people, they increase and multiply with a marvellous rapidity. We do not think we are exaggerating in fixing at 9000 or 10,000 the number of Friars Minors in the whole world, and at 500, at least, those who were settled in France at the moment of the death of their holy founder.

Like every human undertaking, the Order of S. Francis had to stand the double test of time and human inconstancy. It underwent several transformations; but those transformations, whose incontes-

* *Histoire de l'Eglisé du Mans*, by Dom Piolin.

table aim was to bring it back to its primitive fervour, were always effected with the sanction of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. The first reform was that of the Observantines (1368), begun by Paoluccio of Foligno, and which the Council of Constance solemnly approved. Leo X., having tried to amalgamate the Observantines and Conventuals,* that is, those who professed to observe the Rule strictly, and those who had received the privilege of holding property; but, unable to succeed, separated them into two distinct congregations, remitting the seal of the Order to the General of the Observance. A short time after (1525) Padre Matteo di Bassio of Urbino, an Observantine, established a second reform, that of the Capuchins,† approved by Clement VIII. in 1528 and favoured by Charles IX. and Catherine de Médicis, and which soon became the most numerous and popular branch in France. The Supreme Head of the Church has sanctioned these divergences; and each of the three branches forming the First Order — Conventuals, Observantines, and

* The origin of the Conventuals goes back to the time of Brother Elias. Shortly after the founder's death they obtained from their Generals, and subsequently from the Popes, permission to receive revenues and foundations. They were called Conventuals because they lived in large convents, while those who followed the Rule in all its purity lived in hermitages and low, poor houses, their zeal for the Rule causing them to be called Observantines or Fathers of the Regular Observance, of which S. Bernardine of Siena (1419) was the principal promoter. Among the Observantines some still severer reforms were maintained, such as the Alcantarines or Discalced Franciscans of Spain, who formed a distinct body initiated by S. Peter of Alcantara.—*Translator.*

† So called from the capuche or hood, fashioned upon that of S. Anthony of Padua preserved at Rome. They also wear a piece on the back of the habit, as directed by S. Francis. Their habit, besides, is brown, while that of the Conventuals is black. The reform of *Capucines*, or nuns of the second order, was begun at Naples in 1558.—*Translator.*

Franciscans—now has its history, its distinctions,* and its saints. Since its foundation, and in the midst of these vicissitudes, the Order has the signal honour of having given to the Church five Popes, Nicholas IV. (1288–1292), Alexander V. (1409), Sixtus IV. (1470–1484), Sixtus V. (1585–1590), and Clement XIV. (1769–1774),† besides fifty-four cardinals, beginning with S. Bonaventure.

2. In modern times the Seraphic Order reached its apogee in France towards the middle of the eighteenth century. At the close of the reign of Louis XV. there were still 9646 professed scattered through 991 houses, more than two-thirds of the religious in the kingdom, who numbered 26,674. Perhaps the Franciscans were so flourishing because they had best preserved the primitive spirit of their institute. What stopped them in this progressive march? What was the cause of their decadence and their speedy ruin? A study as conscientious as it is accurate by a modern author‡ enables us to elucidate these questions.

The Order of S. Francis encountered on its road two enemies equally bent on its ruin, Jansenism and the Revolution.

Jansenism sounded the charge. On the 31st of July 1766 Louis XV., a weak, dissolute prince, who had begun by banishing the Jesuits (August 6, 1762),

* Each has its privileges. To the Conventuals is confided the guardianship of the tombs of S. Francis and S. Anthony of Padua, and the hermitage of Rivo Torto; to the Observantines, that of the three most celebrated sanctuaries, the Holy Sepulchre, Portiuncula, and Monte Alverno; to the Capuchins, the honour, since Benedict XIV., of supplying the preacher of the Apostolic Palace.

† The present Pope, like his predecessor, is affiliated to the Order as tertiary.

‡ Charles Gerin (*Les monastéres franciscaines, Revue des questions historiques.* 1875.)

constituted a special commission, called the Commission of Regulars, which assumed to itself the strange mission of visiting, "reforming," and destroying all the communities of men in the kingdom. It was composed of five bishops and five counsellors of state; Roche Aymon, Archbishop of Reims, was president, and Lomenie de Brienne, Archbishop of Toulouse, reporter and its moving spirit. Rome was carefully excluded from its conclaves, in which the existence of every monastic institute was discussed. The Commission did the business of Jansenism and the Parliaments so well that, in less than a quarter of a century, it had completely abolished the Camaldulese, Celestines, and the Benedictines of Saint-Maur. Victorious in this onslaught, it directed all its efforts against the Franciscans of every observance, and particularly against the Capuchins and Cordeliers. They did everything to kill them by ridicule, and all sorts of insults and calumnies were daily poured out upon them with the connivance of the government. What was there to reproach them with? Nothing, unless that purity of faith and attachment to the Apostolic See for which they could never forgive them.

In vain most of the bishops undertook their defence; in vain the faithful made their complaints heard; in vain Père Poursel, Provincial of the Friars Minors Conventual of the Province of Lyons, sent noble protestations to the king—they paid no attention to them; and the Commission continued its satanic work. One may judge of the extent of the evil it did by a tabulated statement showing the comparative state of the Order in 1770 and 1790.*

* National archives.

	Houses.	Religious.	
		In 1770.	In 1790.
Observantines and Conventuals	345	2715	1544
Recollects.	223	2534	1558
Capuchins.	423	4397	2674
	991	9646	5776

Jansenism had struck the first blow at the monastic tree. The Constituent Assembly went further: with a stroke of the pen it levelled it to the ground, motionless and lifeless! And time was in France when the populace and its accomplice the law left neither priest nor monk a roof or a bit of bread, and when their life was not safe for a moment (1790). To speak of the Franciscans alone, they were hunted down like wild beasts, seventy-two left their heads upon the scaffold, others were huddled together by hundreds in convict prisons or died of hunger in the hulks, the rest were expatriated. Thus the drama of destruction, begun upon the steps of the throne, reached its denouement on the scaffold or in exile; and the Revolution had at least the merit of being more frank than Jansenism.

"We would prefer the sacrifice of our lives to that of our condition," said the victims to the agents who brutally drove them out of their monasteries. The whole secret of their constancy and victory is in that exclamation.

Writers have been found in our days imprudent enough to undertake to glorify the crimes of the Revolution, and rehabilitate those bloodsuckers called Marat, Danton, Fouquier-Tainville, &c.! We leave them to their dirty work; but at the sight of such an outrage on history, religion, and morality, indignant conscience turns upon them with this avenging

defiance, "To your work again, sons of Cain! For you will have done nothing as long as you shall not have effaced the bloodstains from the executioners' brows!"

Honour, then, to the victims who have fallen for the faith! They have fertilised with their blood the soil of their beloved France! Their sacrifice, long apparently fruitless, has not been sterile; for, if the seraphic tree has grown green again, if it puts forth still more vigorous branches, it is because the blood of the just is always the seed of supernatural life, and has germinated in those darksome tombs where the Order of S. Francis of Assisi seemed buried before its resurrection flashed forth in the daylight of victory.

3. There only remains one point more for us to establish—the present state of the Order. Alas! in the unhappy times we are traversing, in the wild wind of persecution that is dispersing or destroying religious congregations, it would be difficult to compile strictly accurate statistics. We will, therefore, only give some approximate figures. It is computed that there are 26,000 Observantines, 9800 Capuchins, and 2500 Conventuals. Driven out of Germany, persecuted in Italy, hardly restored in Spain, the Friars Minors for the moment have only a very precarious existence in most European states.

In France the religious Orders enjoy since 1848 a relative liberty, of which it is now sought to deprive them. Their restoration only dates back about forty years, and already they form an army. As to the old institute of S. Francis, it has recovered its ancient popularity and is daily acquiring more influence over the masses. Despite the difficulties of the times, there are now 400 Capuchins in France (without counting the provinces of Corsica and Savoy), 200 Observantines

and Recollects,* and five or six Conventuals recently installed in Paris.

Such is the present situation of the Order. We cannot disguise it from ourselves, the present is full of menaces and the future big with perils. The Revolution has its eye upon us, and we know that it has the sanguinary instincts of the tiger and all the hatred of Satan: it is thirsting for Christian blood! It raves of nothing less than the extinction of the Church, and first of all the abolition of the teaching congregations, to reform society on a new model, which is the antithesis of Christianity. The Beast is growling at the bottom of his den, waiting for the hours of darkness to pounce upon his prey. Meanwhile it spues out its unclean slaver upon all that is most sacred and venerable — religion, the priesthood, and the religious Orders. Will modern governments allow it to re-enact the injustices of 1766 and the saturnalias of '93? Will they lend a willing ear to the voice of passion, or rather to that of experience and sound reason?

For them, the whole thing reduces itself to a question of equity. What, in fact, is a convent? And what do we see there? A courtyard surrounded by a portico, where the cries and cravings of the outer world are hushed; a gallery hung with old pictures, geographical maps, a table of the monasteries of the Order, a thousand memorials of earth and heaven as simple as they are touching; narrow cells, adorned only with a crucifix and a few pious images; in fine, men or women the

* The reform of the Recollects, so called on account of the solitary convents where they led a life of retreat or recollection, was established by the B. Peter Villacret and S. Peter Regalado in Spain, early in the fifteenth century, and confirmed by Pope Martin V.

occupation of whose lives is to love and whose passion is to immolate themselves for God, either in the holocaust of prayer or the self-devotion of fraternal charity, without any other hope than the austere joys of sacrifice and the rewards on high—that is what you find in every convent, a peaceful asylum of which Lacordaire could say, "O lovable and holy houses! They have built august palaces on earth; they have raised sublime mausoleums; they fashioned for God dwellings almost divine; but the art and the heart of man never went further than in the creation of a monastery."* We can understand that burst of admiration. The love every good man bears towards those blessed institutions enables us to understand the hatred of those who would demolish them; but what we cannot conceive is their giving umbrage to power, and that it should direct all its batteries against the weakness and innocence it should protect. What! selfishness is devouring and pauperism gnawing you; the lower classes, stirred up by your impiety, are agitated like a stormy ocean, and you have nothing better to do, to avert so many perils, than to stop the progress of Christian self-devotion! When will you comprehend that religion is the corner-stone, the keystone of the social edifice, and that in labouring to demolish it you are at the same time preparing the way for the most dreadful of cataclysms, the destruction of liberty and the undermining of the state? When will you comprehend that the Gospel, and the Gospel alone, is the salvation and resurrection of modern nations, and that in repudiating it you are depriving them of life! that in acting thus you are doing a work not only anti-Christian but anti-social? When will you comprehend

* *Vie de Saint Dominique*, chap. viii.

that no human power can destroy the gift of God *par excellence*, the Catholic Church, and that your principal duty is to protect its liberty? When will you comprehend that the religious bodies are the greatest mainstay of the country, that they answer to the most sacred needs of conscience, and, in the opinion of an author hardly to be suspected of impartiality, they direct human activity into a canal, "the construction of which is a masterpiece and its benefits infinite"?* To break up that canal arbitrarily, brutally, unjustly, and deprive society of its benefits, because it bears the seal of God, is truly an act of folly worthy of a madman, and to which no government, if it have the least honesty, could lend a hand!

And let it not be thought that it is fear that dictates this language! Christ has taken possession of time, and we can look calmly and serenely upon the future. Our confidence reposes upon the two promises of the Divine Master, the one to Peter, the other to S. Francis, the one essential, the other supererogatory, which are continually being accomplished: first, "Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it;" secondly, "I will bless those who shall protect thy Order, and curse those who shall persecute it; and thy triple family shall subsist to the end of ages."

The past guarantees the future, and we have no fears for the Church nor for ourselves. To the last day the Church, aided by the monastic phalanxes, will pursue its mission of peace and justice; to the last day it will combat darkness and barbarism; to the last day it will defend every noble liberty, liberty of souls against the yoke of evil, liberty of peoples against the yoke of

* Taine. *Les origines de la France Contemporaine.*

tyranny, liberty of conscience against the yoke of persecution, liberty of self-devotion to heal the physical and moral wounds of humanity. We have no fears for her; but we tremble for our country, whose very existence is at stake, and we say to all those who are invested with authority, "Beware of committing or permitting one of those crimes that kill nations!" We dare hope you will pay heed to our warnings; but if you despise them, you will perish, and God will conquer. Learn, then, that the race of Cain will not stamp out that of Abel, that the Revolution will not exterminate that clergy and those religious orders who are God's great gift to the world, and that after the storm, in a few years perhaps, the children of Francis, mingling their voices with those of all the priests in the universe, will repeat those triumphant words of the Doctor of the Gentiles, "Jesus Christ yesterday, and to-day, and the same for ever." *

* Heb. xiii. 8.

THE END.

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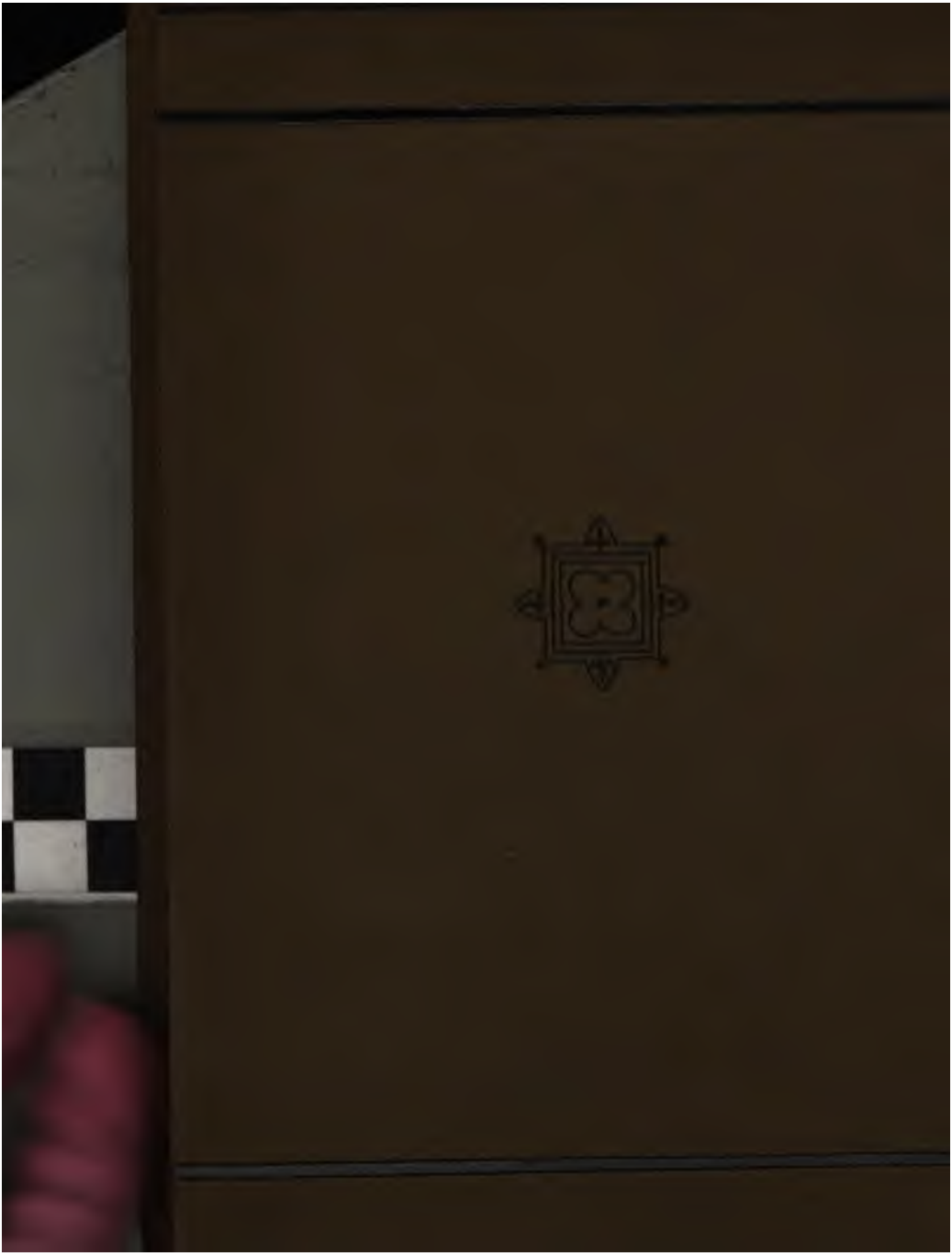
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